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MOTORSPORT NEWS

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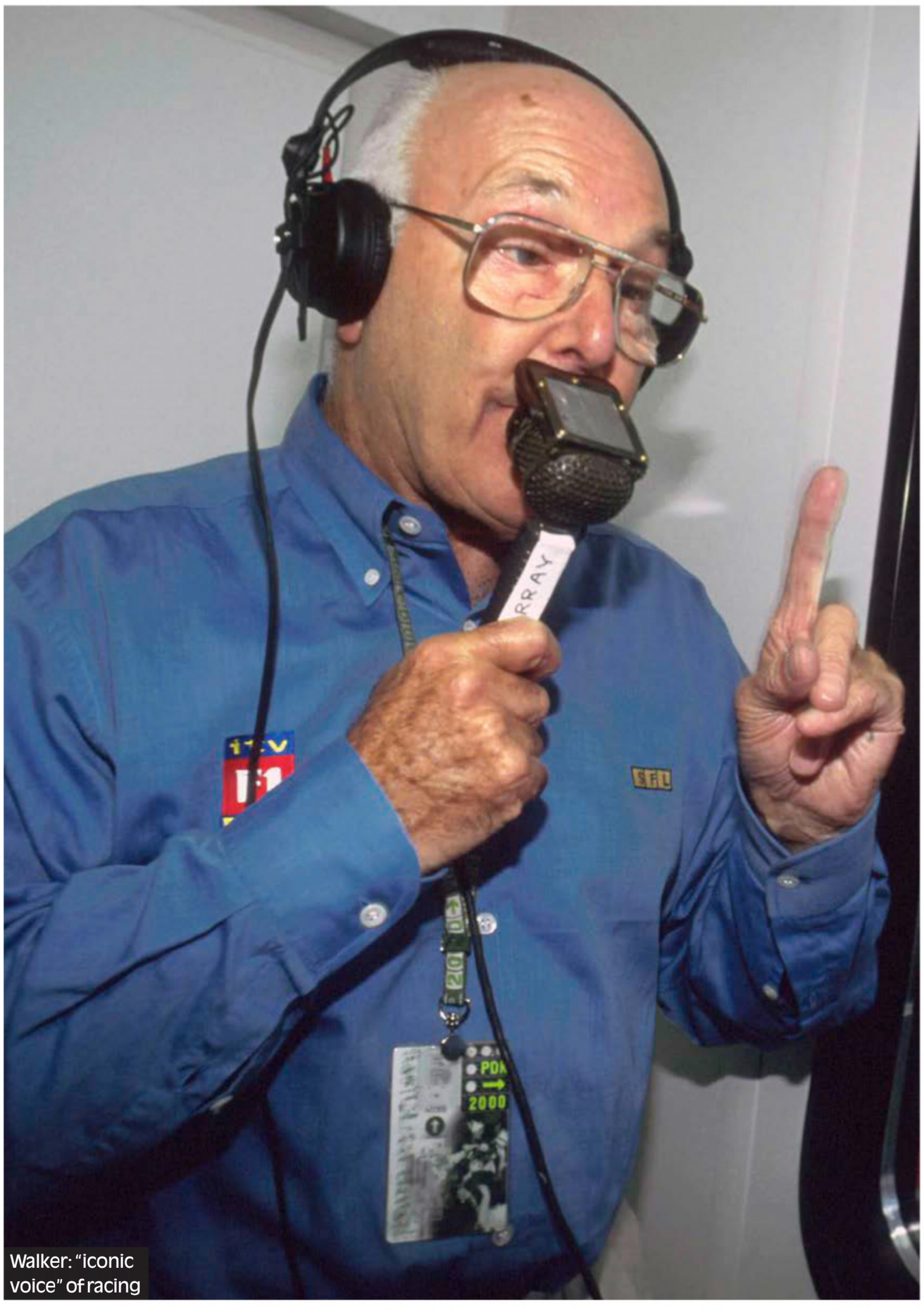
Murray Walker

1923-2021



Walker: "iconic voice" of racing

"A wonderful man in every respect. National treasure, communication genius, Formula 1 legend"
Martin Brundle

"Godspeed Murray, and thanks for so much. The legend will never die"
Damon Hill

"The iconic voice of our sport and a great man, thank you for all you did. You will never be forgotten, rest in peace"
Lewis Hamilton

"Murray was the voice of F1 for so many years, he put his heart and soul into commentating. The legend will always live on in our memories"
Jenson Button

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COMMENT

Photo: Motorsport Images, Jakob Ebrey, Gary Hawkins

Murray's enthusiasm for motorsport was not only restricted to grand prix paddocks

MURRAY: A MAN LIKE NO OTHER

For a whole generation, Murray Walker was motorsport. His voice was so intrinsically linked with the early memories of competition. He was our eyes, ears and sound at so many grands prix.

Growing up with a father who was a top level motorcycle racer, petrol was flowing through his veins from an early age. He joined his father in the commentary box at the Isle of Man TT and at the Shelsley Walsh Hillclimb. A star was born.

Behind the microphone, Walker was a voice for all fans. TV presenter Clive James, the astute observer of Formula 1 and a real enthusiast, said that Murray commentated like his trousers were on fire.

It was that passion and enthusiasm which caused the odd slip-up, but that just added to the style he adopted. The viewer was left in no doubt that what they were watching was exciting because the man at the microphone was reaching boiling point. He was as inclusive as he could be, speaking to the casual fan and the Formula 1 aficionado in the same sentence – itself, a rare skill.

It wasn't only grand prix racing that benefited from Walker's tones. He had a wide-ranging interest in all aspects of competition and could be heard on the BBC tackling everything from rallycross to Formula Ford, from a club meeting at Thruxton to powerboat racing. And, on each topic, he applied research and know-how to bring the viewer along on the journey with him.

For fans of the British Touring Car Championship, he was one of the bedrocks that turned the discipline into the mammoth success it is today when it hit the screens regularly in 1988. His tireless work in stitching together the post-produced highlights was worth the wait when it was finally broadcast on BBC Grandstand. Who can forget that the "car upside down is a Toyota"? But Walker's work wasn't only in the voiceover booth. He was a regular in the paddock, sniffing out the latest piece of information of the latest car upgrades to add some colour to his words on the microphone. That meant that he was quickly taken to the hearts of the competitors and he became friendly with many of them. He was also adored by those who listened to his commentary.

Rest in peace, Murray, you were a true gentleman and will be sorely missed.

Matt James
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MOTORSPORT NEWS

ISSUE MJ3274 MARCH 18 2021

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OBITUARY Murray Walker 1923-2021

MURRAY: THE MAN WHO CREATED A GENERATION OF MOTORSPORT FANS

Colleague and friend Steve Rider pays a very personal tribute to Murray Walker, who passed away last week

Photos: Motorsport Images, Jakob Ebrey

December 18, 1995, is one of those days that BBC Sport will never forget. The hardcore of the BBC Formula 1 team were marooned in a departure lounge at Heathrow Terminal 2 waiting for a delayed flight to Lisbon. At 0800hrs the next morning we had our last and only chance to interview Michael Schumacher for an in-depth documentary that would go out immediately after Christmas. The pressure was on.

Nevertheless, the news that came up on Ceefax still managed to get our full attention. "BBC LOSES FORMULA 1 TO ITV. …1996 WILL BE LAST YEAR OF FORMULA ONE ON THE BBC" screamed the headline. The shock of the news and the implications of this completely unexpected deal would dominate the next 12 hours.

Much delayed, we made the trip to Lisbon and duly got the vital Schumacher interview. Then it was time to check back with London and get all the reaction to the ITV bombshell. It was not what we expected. Certainly it was front page news everywhere but instead of questioning what it might mean for BBC Sport, or indeed the future coverage of Formula 1, everyone wanted to know 'Is this the end of Murray Walker?'

A few days later, it was announced in specialist media that 1996 was going to be the swansong for the man whose seat-of-the-pants style had made him one of the most popular commentators on British TV. But what it made clear to us was that Murray Walker had become the most powerful voice in the rapidly changing landscape of F1 broadcasting.

Mind you, ITV was slow to recognise this, instructing the potential bidders for the production contract to come up with a fresh new commentary approach to take the coverage forward. It soon changed its mind when the Daily Mirror delivered its 700,000-signature 'Save Our Murray' petition and early in 1996 it confided to Murray that, whatever happened, he would be the ITV commentator.

Murray and Steve Rider (right)

However ITV would not tell anyone else and Murray mischievously confided later that summer that the knowledge of this secret guarantee gave him the confidence to go off and sign an exclusive commitment to every one of the potential bidders. I so hope he did.

There are many others in this issue, better qualified than myself, to analyse what Murray brought to motorsport and how he helped shape its popular appeal. For me, as a motorsport fan it was a privilege and a luxury to have regular contact with Murray as he took us through the Ayrton Senna-Alain Prost era, Mansell Mania, Damon Hill's World championship, and also to be in his company on that tragic weekend at Imola in 1994 that he handled with such courage and sensitivity.

The remarkable thing is Murray was 54 years old before he became a regular grand prix commentator. The debut he made in the commentary position at Stowe for the BBC Radio coverage of the 1949 British Grand Prix was a bit of a false start. It would be another 29 years before BBC Television made a regular commitment to this recklessly dangerous sport with its vulgar commercial sponsorship. But when they did, Murray and Fleetwood Mac were there to provide the soundtrack.

In between, Murray had carved out a significant career in advertising and become the voice of just about every other branch of motorsport from trials and TTs to scrambling and rallycross.

As a result, despite impressions, Murray had never become totally immersed in Formula 1: he was first and foremost a fan of motorsport in whatever form it took. We were the beneficiaries of this when we persuaded him to help us develop the new BBC coverage of the British Touring Car Championship.

The race edits were barely 20 minutes long but they were action-packed compilations from remote recorded cameras. Clearly the dubbed commentary would require a bit of preparation and I rather naively suggested it might take Murray the best part of an afternoon.

I was firmly put in my place because if Murray was going to do it, he was going to do it properly. He would come to London. We would check him into a hotel and he would spend a day and a half going through the edit shot by shot. He would ring drivers to establish precisely what was going on and then he would go into advertising copywriter mode. He would compose the right phrase with the right timing for every incident, and even smuggle in a few marketing messages on behalf of the various manufacturers.

He would only make notes, and not write scripts, because he wanted to maintain the 'as live' spontaneity of the commentary but more than anything he enjoyed, for once, settling down behind a microphone and knowing exactly what lay ahead and how he was going to handle it.

The resulting commentary was a theatrical event with the highlight being his dissection of the Frank Sytner-Mike Smith rivalry and Jonathan Palmer vs Nettan Lindgren at Snetterton. In my opinion the authority and entertainment value of Murray Walker was the ingredient that brought a whole new audience to the BTCC and was the foundation of the television and live product it has become today. To paraphrase the advertising slogan that Murray made famous, it was commentary to 'make your mouth water'.

And exactly the same can be said for his input into Formula 1. When he arrived properly on the scene in 1978 there was no consistent coverage, background stories and development of personalities was being ignored and there was little appetite for expanding the solid niche audience.

Walker injected his enthusiasm and passion into all motorsport

By the time he left F1 commentary, it had expanded into a high-tech global broadcasting success story for which Murray would never claim credit. But in Britain and other parts of the world a new audience had been hooked on the rivalries, the drama, the humour and excitement that was embodied by the man behind the microphone. They shared and understood the passion of Murray Walker and thanks to his introduction they were fans for life.

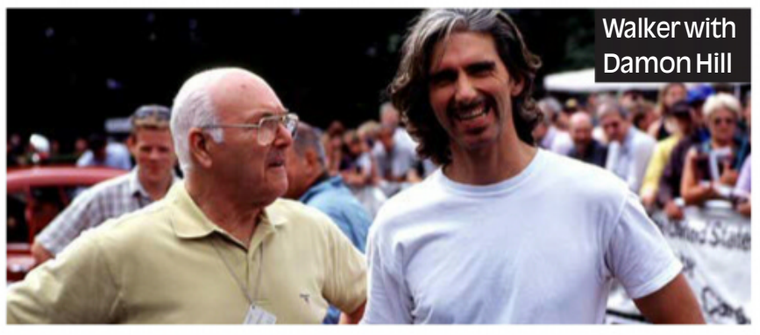
Other hugely talented commentators and analysts have followed Murray into F1 and it now is a very different, data-driven kind of broadcasting challenge. But Murray was the original from a different era of communication. People talk about the golden age of sports broadcasting and I was lucky enough to work alongside the likes of Peter Alliss, Bill McLaren, Peter O'Sullevan and Richie Benaud. But none of them generated a national following and a new audience for their sport quite like Murray Walker. My enthusiasm for motorsport comes from his example and friendship, and the same goes for many others.

RIP Murray Walker, one of the greatest broadcasters in sport.

TRIBUTES TO MURRAY WALKER

Nige and Murray were chums

Walker and Jenson Button


Walker with Damon Hill

"Sad loss of dear Murray a special friend to our family. Many fantastic memories that we will cherish forever."
@nigelmansell
Nigel Mansell, 1992 F1 champion

"I had the honour to meet Murray on a few occasions and what a man he was. Loved bikes and I was always amazed at how much he knew about them and what was going on in the sport. So privileged to have had those chats and his time. RIP Murray Walker"
@calcrutchlow
Cal Crutchlow, MotoGP and Superbike rider

"It's with great sadness we share the news of the passing of BRDC Associate Member Murray Walker OBE. A friend, a true motorsport legend, the nation's favourite commentator and a contagious smile. We thank Murray for all he has done for our community. RIP our friend."
@BRDCSilverstone

"Today we say farewell to one of the greats of our sport, Murray was the voice of F1 for so many years, he put his heart and soul into commentating. The legend will always live on in our memories but, in Murray's words, 'I've got to stop because I have a lump in my throat'."
@JensonButton
Jenson Button, 2009 F1 champion

"So sad to hear of Murray's passing. I remember growing up hearing your voice over the races. You made the sport so much more exciting and captivating. The iconic voice of our sport and a great man, thank you for all you did, you will never be forgotten. Rest in peace."
@LewisHamilton
Lewis Hamilton
Seven-time F1 champion

"Very sad to learn that Murray Walker has passed away. F1 Grand Prix commentator for over 25 years for the BBC and ITV, notably with James Hunt, he was the voice of Formula 1. All the FIA family pays tribute to him. My thoughts are with his loved ones".
@JeanTodt
Jean Todt, FIA president

"Rest in Peace Murray Walker, a gentleman and a legend in every sense of the word. It was an honour to know you, a delight to spend time in your company and inspiring to listen and learn from you. THE voice of Formula 1 and always will be. Thank you xx
@CroftyF1
David Croft
Sky F1 commentator

"Godspeed Murray and thanks for so much. The legend will never die."
@HillF1
Damon Hill
1996 F1 champion

"So very sad to hear of the legend Murray Walker OBE passing away .. he was the voice of F1 and so lucky to have worked alongside him in the commentary box: RIP Murray."
@markblundellf1
Mark Blundell
F1 driver

RACING NEWS

Photos: Motorsport Images

Verstappen says car is more predictable

VERSTAPPEN CAUTIOUS ON RED BULL'S HOPES DESPITE TOPPING BAHRAIN TEST

Dutchman pleased with initial running in new machine after Bahrain outing

By Matt James

Max Verstappen has played down the pace of the Red Bull RB16B after topping the only pre-season Formula 1 group test in Bahrain last week.

The Dutchman clocked the fastest time during the three-day session in the Middle East, setting the benchmark time on the final afternoon of running.

His Honda-powered car was just clear of the AlphaTauri of Japanese rookie Yuki Tsunoda.

Carlos Sainz was third for Ferrari ahead of the Alfa Romeo of Kimi Raikkonen.

World champion Lewis Hamilton spun on his second day of running in the W12 on Saturday, which brought out a red flag. He bounced back on Sunday with the fifth-fastest time.

Verstappen, who was third in last season's World championship, said that the RB16B is more stable than the 2020 model.

He told Dutch TV: "The feeling after the first couple of runs, of course, you always have to adjust things and so on, but it felt very positive. At one point I had a good balance in the car and it just felt nice to drive. It was very, how do you say, predictable."

After his first outing, Verstappen said that he did not pay much regard to the performance of reigning champion Mercedes.

After Hamilton's spin, team-mate Valtteri Bottas also declared that the car was twitchy and hard to drive.

Verstappen said: "At the end of the day, it's a test. The amount of times that Mercedes has topped the testing in the last few years is not that high, so it doesn't really say a lot about pure performance.

"But for us, it's just all about gathering a lot of data."

COMBINED TESTING TIMES

What: Pre-season F1 testing
Where: Bahrain When: March 12-14

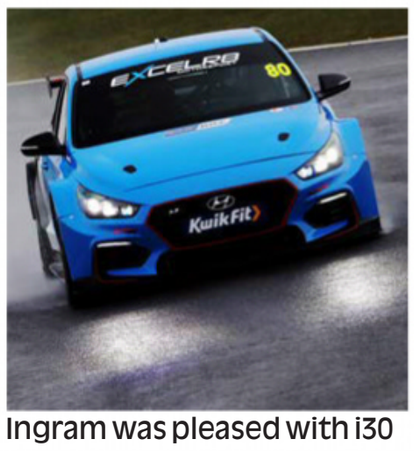
DRIVER	TEAM	TIME
1 Max Verstappen	Red Bull-Honda	1m28.960s (Sun)
2 Yuki Tsunoda	AlphaTauri-Honda	1m29.053s (Sun)
3 Carlos Sainz	Ferrari	1m29.611s (Sun)
4 Kimi Raikkonen	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	1m29.766s (Sun)
5 Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes	1m30.025s (Sun)
6 George Russell	Williams-Mercedes	1m30.117s (Sun)
7 Daniel Ricciardo	McLaren-Mercedes	1m30.144s (Sun)
8 Sergio Perez	Red Bull-Honda	1m30.187s (Sun)
9 Valtteri Bottas	Mercedes	1m30.289s (Sat)
10 Fernando Alonso	Alpine-Renault	1m30.318s (Sun)
11 Pierre Gasly	AlphaTauri-Honda	1m30.413s (Sat)
12 Lance Stroll	Aston Martin-Mercedes	1m30.460s (Sat)
13 Charles Leclerc	Ferrari	1m30.486s (Sun)
14 Lando Norris	McLaren-Mercedes	1m30.586s (Sat)
15 Antonio Giovinazzi	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	1m30.760s (Sat)
16 Esteban Ocon	Alpine-Renault	1m31.146s (Fri)
17 Nikita Mazepin	Haas Ferrari	1m31.531s (Sun)
18 Nicholas Latfiti	Williams-Mercedes	1m31.672s (Sat)
19 Mick Schumacher	Haas-Ferrari	1m32.053s (Sun)
20 Sebastian Vettel	Aston Martin-Mercedes	1m33.742s (Fri)
21 Roy Nissany	Williams-Mercedes	1m34.789s (Fri)

Ingram delighted with initial miles in Excelr8 Hyundai i30

British Touring Car Championship title-chaser Tom Ingram got his first miles in his new Excelr8 Trade Price Cars Racing Hyundai i30 during testing at Snetterton last week and says the machine "fits like a glove".

Ingram has switched from a Speedworks Motorsport Toyota Corolla to the South Korean machine for the 2021 season and his initial running was conducted in mixed conditions over two days in Norfolk. Despite the slippery track, the 27-year-old reported that he was thrilled with the front-wheel-drive coupe.

Ingram said: "The main objective was to make sure everything was working as expected, and we treated the test a little bit like a shakedown, putting into action a lot of our new development parts for 2021. We were running the 2020-spec car because mine is still in-build at the moment, but it was really good to gauge the i30's performance and I was genuinely very impressed. It felt quick and very stable with it.



Ingram was pleased with i30

"Obviously it's a completely new car for me with an entirely different philosophy to what I've driven before – the seat, the steering wheel, the gear lever... everything was in a different place to what I'm used to – but it fit like a glove and within just a handful of laps, I already felt very much at home."

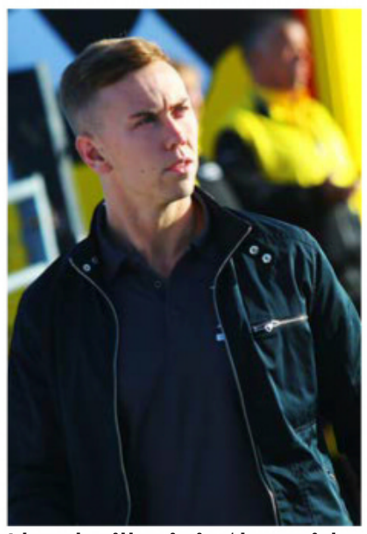
LLOYD GETS FIRST FULL BTCC SEASON WITH POWER MAXED RACING

Race-winner Daniel Lloyd will rejoin the Britsh Touring Car Championship in 2021 at the wheel of a Power Maxed Racing Vaxuhall Astra.

The Yorkshire racer last contested the BTCC when he took part in the second half of the 2018 campaign, and he was a race winner with the BTC team in an FK2 Honda Civic Type R. During that same season, Lloyd claimed victory in the first TCR UK competition at the wheel of a WestCoast Racing Volkswagen Golf GTI.

This year will represent the 29-year-old's first full season in the BTCC, despite having first taken to the grid in 2010. He will line up alongside Jason Plato for the Power Maxed team, which only made sporadic appearance in the BTCC in 2020 after due to the coronavirus situation shelving its planned programme with Plato and Mat Jackson.

Lloyd said: "I'm mega excited to be racing back in the UK, and this will be the first time I'll be heading into the championship with some pre-season testing under my belt. I've always been thrown in at the deep end a little bit, so I can't wait to get stuck into the programme. I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity, and really looking forward to not only working with the team, but also learning from Jason [Plato] and his vast experience. I'm really looking to build on this a long-term partnership and launch a multi-year attack."



Lloyd will rejoin the grid

Yorkshire man will partner Jason Plato at Power Maxed

Team boss Adam Weaver said signing Lloyd to race alongside Plato would give his outfit one of the strongest partnerships on the grid. "He's a driver that's always been on our radar and has always impressed when he's been on the grid in the past," said Weaver. "I don't think anyone can argue that with the right equipment underneath him, he's a genuine championship contender, and with the championship's most successful driver ever alongside him, we certainly think we have one of the strongest pairings on the grid this season."

ZELOS COMMITS TO MINI CHALLENGE UK WITH EXCELR8 MOTORSPORT SQUAD

Zelos will gun for Mini crown

Last year's Mini Challenge UK runner-up Dan Zelos will return to the category for a third season in 2021 at the wheel of an Excelr8 Motorsport machine

The 22-year-old, who is British Touring Car Championship team Excelr8's development driver, will have half-a-day's testing in the crew's top-flight Hyundai i30 later in the season. Zelos, who claimed the Rookie Cup in 2019, has won two Mini Challenge races outright and has landed 14 other podiums in the category.

He said: "After finishing third overall in 2019 and second in 2020, there can only be one goal for 2021. I'm under no illusions that it's going to be an extremely tough field again, but I'm feeling confident and I'm ready for the challenge that lies ahead. I've definitely grown and improved over the past couple of seasons, beating three ex-BTCC drivers last year and equalling [eventual champion] Nathan Harrison for pace pretty much everywhere we we've been."

NEW BTCC CUPRA R BREAKS COVER

Team Hard has taken the wraps off its new-for-2021 British Touring Car Championship racer, the Cupra R. It is the first new build from the Kent crew's upgraded workshops in Kent. There will be four examples on the grid this term, and they will be driven by Jack Goff, Aron Taylor-Smith, Glynn Geddie and a yet-to-be revealed fourth driver. Testing of the new car is due to commence shortly.

Advertising enquiries: 01732 446757

RACING NEWS

Photo: Porsche GB, Jakob Ebrey, Rose Jorba for Formula Woman

Cammish returns to contest where he won two titles

Cammish is also Redline coach

BTCC STAR CAMMISH GETS PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB RETURN FOR 2021

Tin-top frontrunner will race after all in 2021 after loss of BTCC seat with a return to the Redline Racing team with which he won his two Porsche Carrera Cup GB titles

By Graham Keilloh

Dan Cammish will return to race in Porsche Carrera Cup GB this season with Team Redline Racing after the recent loss his 2021 British Touring Car Championship seat.

Cammish in a three-year BTCC stint in a Team Dynamics Honda Civic won eight races and narrowly missed 2019's championship crown. In a surprise move earlier this month it was confirmed there was no 2021 drive for him at the squad, and Cammish told Motorsport News that another imminent BTCC drive was unlikely.

Now Cammish returns to Carrera Cup GB, reuniting with Redline with which Cammish took his two Carrera titles in 2015 and '16, claiming 11 wins from 16 races in his 2015 full debut season before adding 12 more wins the following year.

Cammish with multiple champion Redline has 2021's title in his sights, with which he would become the first driver to win three Carrera Cup GB championships. He'll face formidable opposition though in reigning champion Harry King who recently confirmed his own return this year with Team Parker Racing following a dominant 2020 *(see MN, March 11)*.

Cammish said: "In a way it feels like I never really left, having worked for the team as a driver coach in recent seasons. I have a fantastic relationship with Simon Leonard [Redline managing director], and the whole team showed me a lot of support throughout my time in the BTCC. I am thankful to Simon for the opportunity to return to Porsche racing in the highly competitive Carrera Cup GB."

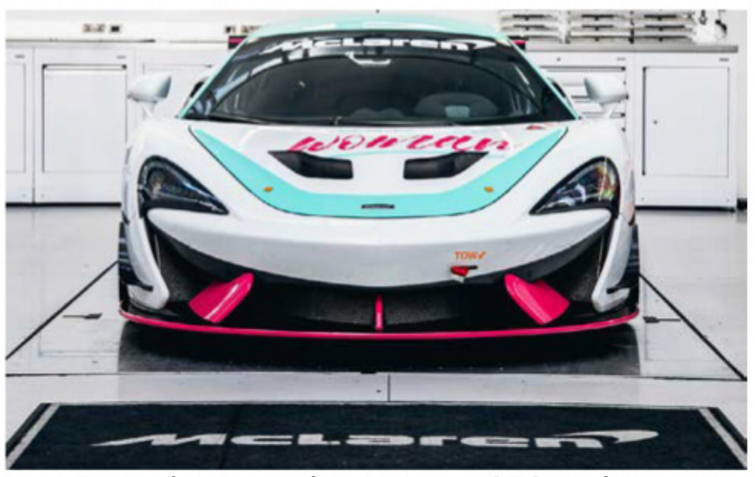
McLAREN GT CUP PRIZE FOR FORMULA WOMAN WINNERS

A drive in 2022's GT Cup championship in one of two McLaren Customer Racing GT4s is on offer to six winners of the returning Formula Woman.

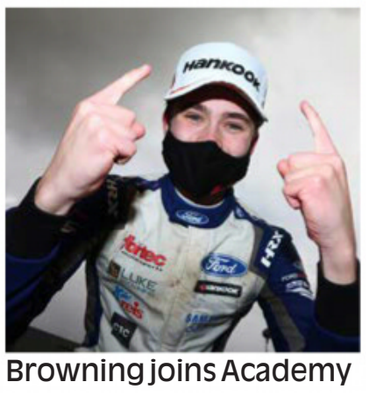
Formula Woman in 2004 had over 10,000 applicants for what was then a race championship, and is now returning as an assessment competition to find the latest top-flight female racers. After online then televised on-track assessments during 2021, 16 finalists proceed to an on-track shootout taking place by end of February 2022. From that six winners will be selected and receive full training ahead of the GT Cup season.

Formula Woman CEO Graeme Glew said: "To receive the support from McLaren is incredible. The GT4 is an amazing car with huge power and will give the winners a truly memorable experience with a very real chance of winning races."

Formula Woman's applications opened last week. Eligible participants are those aged over 17, hold a full driving licence and have little or no racing experience.



New Formula Woman has McLaren GT Cup chances



Browning joins Academy

MOTORSPORT UK UNVEILS ITS HEALTHY 100-STRONG ACADEMY CLASS OF 2021

Reigning British GT champion Sandy Mitchell, reigning British Formula 4 champion Luke Browning and reigning Porsche Carrera Cup GB title-holder Harry King are among 2021's additions to Motorsport UK's Academy.

The Academy is the governing body's talent development pathway, selecting the UK's most promising competitors and equipping them with required tools and attributes. In total 100 from racing and rallying are in the class of 2021. The full list can be viewed at: motorsportuk.org/motorsport-uk-academy-selections-2021/.

This year Motorsport UK introduces the Team UK Futures initiative, combining the Squad and Co-Driver programmes, with Academy progression now a clear pathway via three core programmes: Team UK, Team UK Futures and Enhanced DiSE. A newly established Podium Programme will also ensure that Academy alumni can still access support.

Motorsport UK competitors pathway manager Katie Baldwin said: "Due to a disrupted 2020 season, the Motorsport UK Academy cohort couldn't benefit from a full programme delivery. Whilst we tried to do as much as possible virtually, we're really looking forward to seeing our drivers in person later this year and delivering exciting and informative sessions with our supporting partners."

FIESTA JUNIOR RUNNER-UP WILL ORTON MOVES TO GINETTA GT5 CHALLENGE

The 2020 Fiesta Junior championship runner-up Will Orton will switch to the Ginetta GT5 Challenge this season continuing with Alastair Rushforth Motorsport.

The 16-year-old last year graduated from karting to Fiesta Juniors and took six podium finishes from eight races plus the rookie title.

Orton said: "The [Ginetta] championship offers great racing and was the logical next step for me and the team." He added that testing is going well and he's getting used to rear-wheel drive and slick tyres.

Fellow karting graduate Alex Ley will with ARM complete a full Fiesta Juniors season this year, having competed in just two 2020 rounds with the team due to other commitments.

Orton steps up to Ginettas with ARM

IN BRIEF

Ratcliffe's return

Ryan Ratcliffe is aiming for Porsche Carrera Cup GB's Pro-Am championship title in 2021 after sealing his return to the contest with Team Parker Racing. The 27-year-old, who used to race with Team Parker in British GT, on his series debut in the contest last year finished as narrow runner-up to stablemate Esmee Hawkey with TPR.

Revolution resumes

Revolution A-Ones will this season support Formula 1's Portuguese Grand Prix for the second year running, this time as a class within O Campeonato de Portugal de Velocidade. There will be two 20-minute races plus one 45-minute race with a compulsory pitstop. Olympic legend Sir Chris Hoy will be among those competing.

Combe value

Castle Combe Racing Club is drumming up entries for its Easter Monday April 5 Howard's Day meeting. CCRC's GT and Saloon championships each get two 15-lap races for £355, Hot Hatch gets two 20-minute races for £330 and Formula Fords two 10-lap races for £305. All get 15 minutes to qualify. The compact timetable runs from 0930hrs to 1615hrs.

O'Sullivan steps to British F3

O'SULLIVAN BECOMES YOUNGEST SUPERSTAR

Last year's British Formula 4 close title runner-up 16-year-old Zak O'Sullivan has become the youngest driver in the history of British Racing Drivers' Club's SuperStars talent-supporting programme.

BRDC has confirmed its 13-driver roster for 2021, with O'Sullivan one of four new names along with Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion Harry King, ADAC Formula 4 champion Jonny Edgar and DTM Trophy race-winner Ben Tuck.

Close to 100 drivers, including Lando Norris and George Russell, have benefited from the programme since it began in 2008. The 2021 selection features seven reigning champions and a Le Mans class victor.

O'Sullivan, who this year graduates to British F3, still with Carlin, said: "It's a genuine honour to be selected after only two years of car racing. I'm really grateful to Andy [Meyrick, director] and the team at the BRDC for showing faith in me – I'll be doing all I can to repay that across the season."

CLASS OF 2021

BRDC 2021 SuperStars

NAME	CATEGORY
Jonny Edgar	FIA Formula 3
Tom Gamble	European Le Mans Series
Phil Hanson	FIA World Endurance Championship and European Le Mans Series
Daniel Harper	Nurburgring Endurance Series
Jake Hill	British Touring Car Championship
Johnathan Hoggard	TBC
Callum Ilott	GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup
Harry King	Porsche Carrera Cup GB
Sandy Mitchell	British GT championship
Zak O'Sullivan	BRDC British Formula 3
Ash Sutton	British Touring Car Championship
Dan Ticktum	FIA Formula 2
Ben Tuck	Nurburgring Endurance Series

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RACING NEWS

Photo: Jakob Ebrey, Motorsport Images, Jon Elsey, British GT

TF won GT4 '20 title double

TF boss Tom Ferrier says British GT interest "very quiet"

'NO GUARANTEE' CHAMPION TF WILL RACE IN 2021 BRITISH GT

British GT kingpin TF Sport has admitted competitor interest is currently low for taking part in home championship

By Graham Keilloh

Reigning British GT drivers' and teams' champion TF Sport might not be on the championship's grid this season due to not having any entries in place.

TF in 2020 claimed its second British GT4 drivers and teams' title double in a row, and won 2019's GT3 drivers' title plus in 2018 took GT3's teams' championship.

Team boss Tom Ferrier told Motorsport News "It's very quiet at the moment. I'm still speaking to Giacomo [Petrobelli], we're speaking to Ahmad Al Harthy still, we're still looking at options, but there's no denying it's not busy. I wouldn't say there's any guarantee we'll be on the grid at the moment.

"I've had zero enquiries over GT4 which is very strange given we've won it the last two years. And when you look at the size of the grid for the last [2020] round at Silverstone you would think it'd be booming.

"We're still looking at other races like GT Open or Michelin Le Mans Cup. I'm sure we'll do some bits in GT3, we may even do a couple of rounds of British later in the year. There's plenty of people talking about things but whether there'll be a full programme I'm not sure, it's getting very late in the day."

TF will not be idle this year however as it has World Endurance Championship and European Le Mans Series programmes plus competed in 2021's Daytona 24 Hours and Asian Le Mans Series.

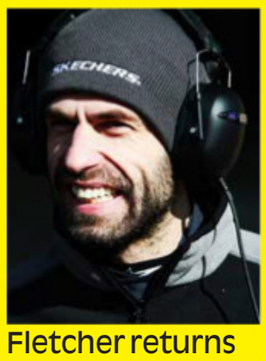
FLETCHER AND PLOWMAN AT LAST SET FOR BRITISH GT3 ASSAULT

Kelvin Fletcher and Martin Plowman will make their GT3 debuts in British GT this season in a JRM Racing Bentley, one year on from the step-up being scuppered by Covid.

Emmerdale actor and Strictly Come Dancing winner Fletcher alongside LMP2 Le Mans victor Plowman won 2019's Pro-Am British GT4 title in a Beechdean Aston Martin, and now get a full-season Continental GT3 assault.

Fletcher said: "Nothing beats actually being out in the car and Brands Hatch can't come soon enough. We've still only completed a handful of laps in the Bentley – 2020's Media Day was my first and only meaningful running with the car, but we'll be putting that right before the season starts. And we'll need to because the championship's renewed emphasis on Pro-Am has resulted in some very strong GT3 driver combinations."

JRM team manager Elliot Dason-Barber said running a second Continental GT3 is also being evaluated. He explained: "Being able to share a second crew's data is always useful, and that's something we're also working on. Another JRM-run Bentley isn't out of the question."



Fletcher returns

RaceZero to offset racers' carbon

750MC LAUNCHES CARBON REDUCTION INITIATIVES

The 750 Motor Club has unveiled two carbon reduction initiatives for the 2021 season as part of a drive to ensure club-level motorsport remains sustainable.

RaceZero, devised by CALM All Porsche Trophy organiser Philip Waters with Eco Trailer founder Simon Walker-Hansell, aims to offer a service from April's season start wherein UK competitors can buy tokens to offset their entries' carbon output, taking into account distance travelled and fuel consumed on track.

The 750MC will support the scheme, and the club also has pledged to pay the carbon output offset of all competitors' cars at all of its meetings in 2021.

The club's competitions manager Giles Groombridge said: "In an ever more carbon-conscious world, it is vital that our competition becomes sustainable going forwards, whilst also being mindful that motorsport could all-too easily be seen as an easy target. This will be just the first step in the club's forthcoming plan."

Silverstone date delayed

750MC PUSHES BACK SEASON-OPENER

The 750 Motor Club has postponed its two-day Silverstone meeting, due to be its season opener, from April 3-4 to April 24-25.

This enables 750MC's pre-season trackday to be rescheduled for April 3. The club's single-day Donington Park April 5 meeting is unaffected.

Following the government's Covid restriction-easing 'roadmap' there have been concerns about required travel and accommodation prior to April 12, particularly for multi-day meetings.

The British Automobile Racing Club meanwhile has confirmed its Brands Hatch April 10-11 truck meeting is rearranged for June 5-6.

METRO CHAMPION ASHTON SEEKS HOT HATCH COMPETITION

Twice MG Metro Cup champion Jack Ashton is hoping for more competitive fare from switching to the 750 Motor Club's Hot Hatch championship for 2021.

Ashton last year moved from Metro Cup to MG Cup, with an upgraded Metro engine, and won four races from six. In 2021 he will race in restructured Hot Hatch's frontrunning Class A.

He told Motorsport News: "It's just the 'ease of' with the regulations, we wouldn't have to do too many changes to the car. We looked into doing Classic Stock Hatch last year and it was just way too many things, and backward steps.

"The reason to change was competition. I had Mike [Williams to compete with in MG Cup], I was just after something else. With reliability we only really got one race that was close all season. [We're] within a second of the top [Hot Hatch] guys, so hoping that we can find that. Top five for the championship would be epic for our first year. My main goal is eventually to win a couple of races, if not get a championship."

Metro man Ashton wants Hot Hatch success

OBITUARY

Keith Greene
1938-2021

Greene and Harvey in BTCC

Motorsport News was very sad to hear of the passing of Formula 1 driver and successful endurance and touring car team manager Keith Greene last week aged 83.

Greene via his father Sydney's Gilby Engineering entrant grew up around motorsport. Keith's car racing career began in 1955 and he started three F1 world championship grands prix between 1960 and '62, first in a Cooper then twice with a Gilby chassis.

Greene later moved into team management and won the British Saloon Car championship in 1967 and '68 with Frank Gardner and Alan Mann Racing. In 1972 he was asked by Bernie Ecclestone to manage his newly-acquired Brabham F1 team. Greene subsequently moved to endurance racing and worked with many of its best-known names.

He later returned to the BTCC and won the 1992 championship with Tim Harvey and Vic Lee Motorsport, then managed the Renault works team.

Harvey said on Facebook: "Very sad to hear of the passing of one of motorsport's true characters. 'KG' to us all had the most amazing sense of humour and was a bloody good team manager."

RALLY NEWS

M-SPORT AHEAD OF THE GAME WITH DEVELOPMENT OF NEW RALLY1 WEAPON

The car that M-Sport hopes will revive its fortunes in the World Rally Championship has completed its initial running.

Built to the new-for-2022, hybrid-based Rally1 regulations, M-Sport's latest WRC contender is the first Rally1 car to turn a wheel.

The important milestone was marked by a tweet from the Cumbria-based firm, which contained audio of the engine running for the first time.

Although details of the base car that M-Sport is using for its Rally1 bid remain under wraps, it is known that Ford, through its Ford Performance division, has made a significant contribution towards design, build and development costs.

"We've done some initial running," M-Sport boss Malcolm Wilson said. "There's a fairly rigorous schedule of testing and development planned over the next few months – with a variety of different surfaces and climates.

"Of course, we're still right at the start of this project with a very long way to go, but I'm already impressed with the work carried out by Chris Williams and his team – both here at M-Sport, but also with the help of Ford's technical team in America."

Motorsport News understands that although M-Sport has stolen a march on its WRC rivals by getting its Rally1 car moving, minor issues with elements of the hybrid kit mean full performance testing is unlikely to begin until next month.

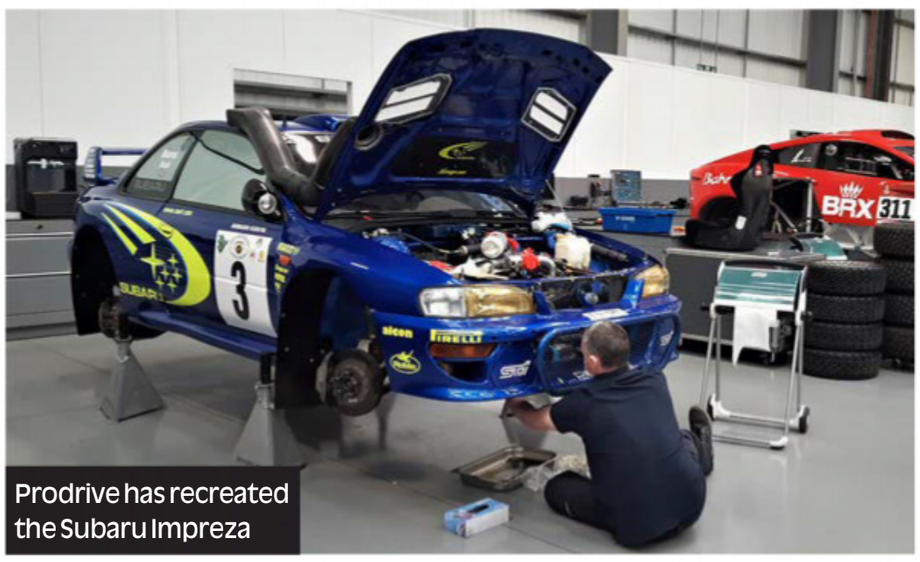
"There are some small changes needed but everything is not far away," a source confirmed.

Yves Matton, the FIA rally director, has described the roll-out phase of Rally1 cars as a "significant moment in the history of our sport".

In a notable period for M-Sport, Ken Torn gave the company's Fiesta Rally3 its world debut on the O.K Auto-Ralli in Finland on March 6 and finished 11th overall. The M-Sport Poland car is the first Rally3 machine to break cover.

M-Sport's teaser of the Rally1 car (left). The Rally3 car's bow (below)

Photos: Prodrive, mcklein-imagedatabase.com, Hyundai



Prodrive has recreated the Subaru Impreza

Richard Burns on his way to success on the Safari Rally back in in 2000

EX-BURNS IMPREZA REBORN TO CELEBRATE ENGLISHMAN'S TITLE

Prodrive Legends recreates the Safari Rally-winning Subaru from 2000

By Graham Lister

Prodrive is marking the 20th anniversary of Richard Burns becoming England's first World Rally champion this November by recommissioning the Impreza he used to win the Safari Rally in 2000.

Through its Prodrive Legends restoration arm, the company will essentially get the Impreza S5 WRC '99 operational again following 10 years of inactivity on display at its Banbury HQ.

Although any public running is dependent on lockdown restrictions easing, Paul Howarth, Prodrive's motorsport operations director, confirmed the car won't lie dormant.

"We'll probably showcase the car at a couple of events this year," Howarth said. "We're not sure what yet but when everything opens up again [we'll have a better idea]."

The car was originally rebuilt after Burns and Robert Reid won the Kenya-based Safari Rally on February 27, 2000. It has been restricted to occasional outings since then, including the Goodwood Festival of Speed.

"It's not a rebuild or anything like that, just everything you have to do when you've left a car stood for so long," Howarth explained. "Transmission-wise it's from the early-generation auto-shift so we'll take the gearbox out and run it on the rig and change all the fluids, check the brake callipers, put new mast cylinders on it, change the cambelt on the engine, look at the safety aspects, things like that. Obviously the last thing you want to do is risk damaging the engine, that's why we'll put a new cambelt on it."

Howarth said it's likely that he or Prodrive technical supremo David Lapworth will be called on for driving duties. "It's a Safari car and doesn't need driving at full pace, it's just a demonstration," Howarth said.

Where is the white stuff? An unsnowy Sweden in '20

SWEDISH EVENT DEPENDS ON ARCTIC CONDITIONS FOR TOP-FLIGHT WORLD RALLY ROSTER RETURN

Rally Sweden needs to guarantee proper winter conditions if it's to return to the World championship roster next season, based on comments from FIA top brass.

The WRC's traditional snow event was axed for this season due to Covid restrictions in the country with Arctic Rally Finland stepping in as an 11th-hour, but hugely successful, replacement.

Rally Sweden was already under threat following a significantly snow-less 2020 edition. And its hopes of a firm WRC future have not been helped by comments from FIA president Jean Todt during a visit to Finland's first winter WRC event last month.

Speaking to WRC All Live's Julian Porter, Todt said Arctic Rally Finland is "what we need", adding: "Of course, February is the symbolic for WRC in north countries. It used to be in Sweden. Unfortunately, the last years in Sweden were not very good for snow. That's the reason why we were hoping to go more to the north.

"It was fantastic that AKK [Finnish federation], also the mayor of the city [of Rovaniemi], have put a lot of effort at the last minute in order to host the winter WRC event in Rovaniemi."

FIA rally director Yves Matton said: "We have been struggling for snow on Rally Sweden, but going to Lapland meant we had proper conditions. Based on the commitment, we have been able to achieve great things."

MN was unable to contact Rally Sweden CEO Glenn Olsson for a comment.

OSTBERG TO BATTLE FOR HUNGARIAN NATIONAL TITLE IN WRC2 CITROEN

Mads Ostberg will begin his WRC2 title-defending season – in Hungary.

The Norwegian, 33, has joined Hungarian team Tagai Racing Technology to drive an upgraded Citroen C3 Rally2. As well as contesting all eight rounds of the Hungarian championship, including the national section of the European Rally Championship-counting Rally Hungary in October, Ostberg will undertake a seven-event WRC2 bid with the Tagai team.

"Defending the title with a new team is going to be a big challenge," said Ostberg. "We have worked a lot with Citroen and TRT to put this together."

Ostberg had been scheduled to contest last November's Rally Hungary with backing from the country's Citroen importer as preparation for the Ypres Rally. When the Belgian event was axed, Ostberg canned his entry.

The Hungarian championship begins with the Miskolc Rallye from April 16-18.

BREEN HOSPITALISED IN ITALIAN CRASH

Craig Breen and co-driver Paul Nagle needed a check-up in hospital after crashing out of Rally il Ciocco e Valle del Serchio in Tuscany last Saturday.

The Irish duo had won two stages and were fifth overall on the Italian championship opener when they left the road and rolled down a steep drop.

Although their Hyundai i20 R5 suffered extensive damage after it flattened a tree during the rapid descent, neither Breen nor Nagle were injured.

"We picked up a puncture on the front right on a fast-right corner followed immediately by a left that tightened," Breen explained. "The moment I turned into the left, the tyre just skipped off the bead and we were passengers. The car done its job, kept myself and Paul safe and we're OK, albeit a bit shaken up.

"We'd done two fastest times up until that point. After a spin on the third stage, we were starting to make some in-roads back into the leaders again. We were quite confident that we could have caught back up but, unfortunately, that was the cards we were dealt with."

Breen's Hyundai factory WRC team-mate Thierry Neuville won the event with a 22.7-second margin over Stefano Albertini.

KATSUTA'S CONSISTENCY FOR TOYOTA TURNS HEADS

Takamoto Katsuta's second sixth-place finish on the bounce in the World Rally Championship was his best yet, according to his driver coach Juho Hanninen.

Katsuta, who is co-driven by Briton Daniel Barritt, completed the top six on Arctic Rally Finland last month to equal his previous best result at world level in his Toyota Yaris WRC.

Afterwards, European champion Hanninen said: "This was the best rally that Taka has done with the Yaris. I know he was expecting a bit more and maybe a slightly better result. But at the same time, the time lost at the finish to the drivers ahead was quite small and clearly the smallest gap he has had in the WRC, so also from that side the result is good.

Katsuta, who moved up from seventh to sixth on the final stage when Oliver Solberg spun, said: "I still have a lot to learn and I'm even more motivated than before."

Katsuta was sixth again

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RALLY NEWS

IN BRIEF

Williams joins Academy

New Team UK members
Co-drivers Phil Hall and Keaton Williams have been selected as part of Motorsport UK's Academy, joining drivers Rhys Yates and Tom Williams in Team UK. Hall's 2021 programme is unclear, but Williams will co-drive Josh McErlean who was confirmed as a Hyundai Junior driver last week. A Team UK Futures category has also been added to the Academy, featuring eight co-drivers that are all already working with Nicky Grist and Paul Spooner.

Extended seat life
Motorsport UK has extended the validity of certain FIA-homologated competition seats by 12 months due to coronavirus suspending rallying. The extension applies to seats that have an expiry date of 2020 or '21, with the regulation freeze allowing them to still be used a year after their homologation label runs out. This exemption will cease after December 31, 2022.

BTRDA esports series
Entries close for the first BTRDA Virtual Rally championship on Saturday for what will be a four-round season hosted on DiRT Rally 2.0. There will be six classes (three historic; three modern) with class titles awarded as well as overall. Points will be awarded from first to 20th place with powerstage bonus points available for the top five drivers on the final stage. Email Russell Thompson on r-m-thompson@outlook.com for details.

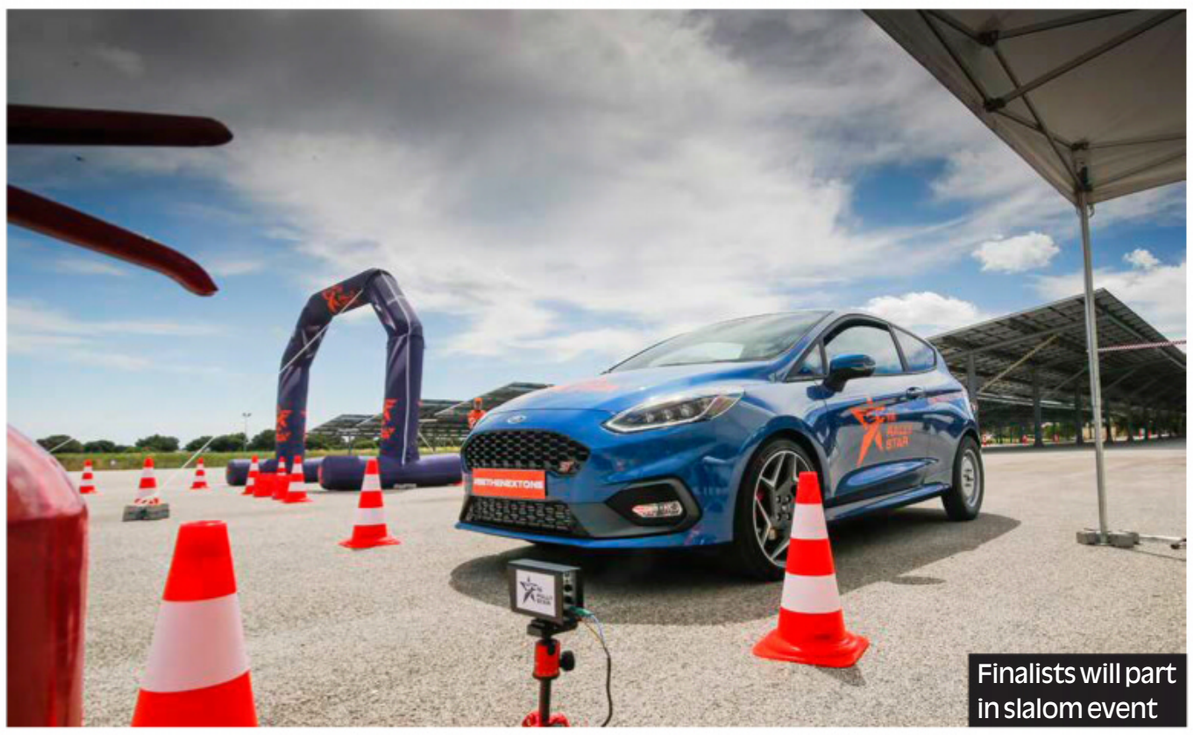
Irishmen head abroad
Cathan McCourt (Ford Fiesta Rally2) and Jason Mitchell (Ford Fiesta R5) have entered the opening round of the French Tarmac series, Rallye Le Touquet near Calais. Both men have recent European experience having contested the 2020 ERC finale: Rally Islas Canarias. They will be up against similarly stiff opposition in France with WRC2 driver Nikolay Gryazin and French legend Gilles Panizzi on the entry list. The rally was to be this weekend but has been postponed to April 9-10.

MOTORSPORT UK GETS INVOLVED IN FIA RALLY STAR

Governing body aims to unearth the next wave of home-grown talent to tackle the biggest stages

Photos: Jakob Ebrey, Martin Walsh

Virtual events are part of process



Finalists will part in slalom event

By Luke Barry

Motorsport UK has confirmed its involvement in the FIA's Rally Star programme – which is aiming to find the next World Rally champion – with the first detection programme taking place next on Saturday, March 27.

The United Kingdom has spawned two WRC drivers' champions in the past with Colin McRae (1995) and Richard Burns (2001) both winning with Subaru. Several other drivers have tasted success recently too, with Elfyn Evans almost winning the 2020 title and Chris Ingram taking the 2019 European Rally Championship crown.

The Motorsport UK FIA Rally Star detection programme is open to any UK resident aged between 17 and 26 and will begin on March 27-April 1 with the first of three #RallyAtHome challenges. The next two take place between April 10-15 and April 24-29.

Twenty-five places are up for grabs from the virtual events with that final 25 taking part in an Autosolo Slalom Challenge on Friday June 4 at Motorsport UK's Bicester HQ. The winner will represent UK in the European continental final later that month.

Motorsport UK boss Hugh Chambers said: "Rallying is a huge part of the UK's motorsport heritage and this competition is another great opportunity for us to attract the next generation of 'rally stars' via an accessible and affordable format that allows us to connect with a younger demographic. I look forward to following the online events and to welcoming the finalists to our new home in Bicester for the UK final."

HIGH HOPES FOR NEW CORSA BUILD

BTRDA regular Ben Cree is looking forward to trying out his newly built Vauxhall Corsa as he seeks to take the battle to the Ford Fiesta R2s.

Cree usually pilots a Peugeot 205 but he has sold that to fund his new build, which has been fitted with a Bill Falconer-tuned 1600cc engine that produces around 200bhp.

Cree told MN: "It's something different, there's the odd [Corsa] Kit Car that's over here but I've never seen another one used and not in the forests which is what I'm planning to use it for.

"I want to have a bit of an assault with the Fiestas, previously I just had a 1600 205 and with that I've been in the top three of class results.

"So I just wanted something with a bit more power, a bit more modern, with some suspension and then just try and have that attack. With it being something new we just need to get it out there and have a go with it."

While many have been struggling with the absence of regular rallying for over 12 months now, Cree thinks it's actually assisted him.

"If the rallies were on, I'd be itching to be out," he added, "but because I'm at home building it you're not having to rush things, you get everything done right."

Cree is eager to get on stage in his new Vauxhall Corsa

Killarney organsiers have been censured by governors

KILLARNEY CLUB WITHDRAWS APPEAL

The Killarney and District Motor Club has withdrawn its appeal into matters arising from a report of the joint Motorsport Ireland Rally Commission and MI Safety Commission into the running of the 2019 Killarney Historic Rally.

An investigation last year found there was a breach of the rules and MI Sport Council slapped a €5000 fine on the club, issuing a 15-month ban to three club officials. Two of the three officials have withdrawn their individual appeals. Initial plans to host the appeals failed due to unsuitable circumstances but the recent withdrawals have since changed the landscape. Instead, the KDMC has agreed to meet a four-person MI delegation as soon as Covid restrictions will allow.

The purpose of the investigation was to determine why the emergency services were not deployed to the scene of an accident on the second run over Moll's Gap. However, it appears it uncovered other aspects that, allegedly, didn't conform. Much relates to the Ambulance Deployment Plan that, prior to the event, was discussed by relevant officials.

Two of the club officials suspended were unaware of the incident until the end of the rally due to the communication systems while the accident was dealt with on the ground by experienced rally personnel, who were not listed as officials on the day. The club fine has not yet been paid.

NEW RALLY2 KIT CARS FOR EUROPE

At least three cars built to the Rally2 Kit regulations will contest this season's European Rally Championship despite governing body, the FIA, confirming the cars will no longer be eligible for the ERC2 division from 2022.

Under the Rally Sporting Pyramid revealed following the recent FIA World Motor Sport Council meeting, the ERC2 title for production-based cars will not be awarded from next season with Rally2 Kit and Group N machinery eligible for overall honours only.

The three Rally2 Kit cars set for ERC action in 2021 are all Suzuki Swifts. Two will be run by the make's Spanish importer for Spaniard Javier Pardo and Andorra's Joan Vinyes, with Russian Sergei Remennik returning to the championship in a third Suzuki.

SNOWMAN RALLYTHON PROVES A MASTERSTROKE

The Snowman Rallython – held on the date the 2021 Snowman Rally should have been – has raised in excess of £5000 for local charities with support from the entire world of rallying.

Interviews with past winners and local heroes, written content and pictures were shared on social media throughout the day with the aim of raising funds for Mikeysline, Headway Highland and the Highland Foodbank through donations, a blind auction and a virtual bonus ball competition. The donation link remains open until Saturday (March 20) with event ambassador Ari Vatanen – who was third on the 1976 Snowman Rally – offering to personally sign 10 event T-shirts at random to those who purchase one.

President of the Highland Car Club Fiona Munro said: "I am very proud of the team for putting the online Snowman event together. It was a fantastic and very well received event during what has been a difficult year for everyone. I would also like to thank Ari for his support, all those who contributed to the event itself – and of course a huge thanks to the Snowman team."

For more information on how to donate or get merchandise, visit snowmanrally.co.uk.

Ari Vatanen is ambassador

RALLY NEWS

BRC ADDS ULSTER RALLY TO 2021 CALENDAR

Northern Irish visit to round off six-event British rally contest for fresh season

Photos: Jakob Ebrey

Ulster will host the BRC showdown in 2021

By Luke Barry

British Rally Championship organisers have unveiled a revised six-round calendar for 2021, with the Ulster Rally joining the schedule as the new season finale.

The first three rounds of the series – the Circuit of Ireland, Tendring & Claction and Jim Clark Rallies – have already been cancelled due to the ongoing pandemic, meaning the series will now begin on July 10 with the Nicky Grist Stages.

The Grampian Forest Rally and Trackrod Rally Yorkshire complete the first half of the year before the season's first asphalt event: Mull Rally, which has been added to the calendar as the championship's official reserve round. The Cambrian and Ulster Rallies complete the season in October and November. MN understands there were plans to hold a seventh event in 2021 but arrangements for that to be included on the BRC calendar fell through.

British Rally Championship manager Iain Campbell said: "We have been working very hard behind the scenes to create a calendar worthy of the British Championship title and I truly believe we have come up with an exciting, challenging yet cost-effective offering. Of course, we were disappointed to lose the opening three rounds of the planned 2021 calendar and we were eager to ensure we could still provide a six-round series that encompassed both gravel and asphalt surfaces, as well as each event having a unique format and style."

Reigning champion Matt Edwards has so far been the only driver to publicly pledge his commitment to the 2021 season – switching from an M-Sport Ford Fiesta Rally2 to a Volkswagen Polo GTI R5.

CALENDAR

2021 British Rally Championship

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
July 10	Nicky Grist Stages	Builth Wells, Wales
August 14	Grampian Forest Rally	Banchory, Scotland
Sep 24-25	Trackrod Rally Yorkshire	Scarborough, England
October 8-9	Mull Rally	Tobermory, Scotland
October 30	Cambrian Rally	Llandudno, Wales
Nov 19-20	Ulster Rally	Newry, Northern Ireland

OBITUARY

Phil Price

Motorsport News was saddened to learn of the passing of Phil Price, a former rally driver and owner of the renowned Phil Price Rally School, last week after a battle with cancer.

Price was a rally man through and through and was a veteran of over 100 national and international starts. He was also a keen mechanic and built the iconic V6-powered Ford Escort 4x4 which won the York National Rally the day after the build had been completed. The car was driven by none other than Ayrton Senna on a rally filming day in 1986 too.

Price and his wife Sheila opened Phil Price Rally School in 1989 and it's in this capacity he was perhaps best known. A patient yet enthusiastic teacher, Price was instrumental in helping several British rallying careers over the years and the Rally School is still going strong today.

MN would like to extend its condolences to all of Phil's family, friends and colleagues.

DELAYED AZORES RALLY GETS GREEN LIGHT FOR EUROPEAN ROUND

The Azores Rallye has been given the green light by local authorities with fans also allowed.

Rescheduled as the FIA European Rally Championship opener from May 6-8, the permission means organisers can press ahead with preparing for the gravel event, which is held on the mid-Atlantic island of Sao Miguel and is set to celebrate its 55th edition in 2021.

In another boost to the ERC calendar, Rally Zlin organisers have also began planning for their 50th anniversary event from August 27-29.

Both rallies, mainstays of the ERC, were cancelled at short notice last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

NICKY GRIST STAGES 2021 TO FEATURE MONUMENT BUT MISSES ROUTE 60

The popular Route 60 stage will not feature on this year's Nicky Grist Stages, being replaced by the Monument test due to resurfacing work that still needs time to settle.

Route 60 hasn't featured on the itinerary since 2018 when Matt Edwards won both passes of the stage and that year's rally.

As well as Monument, the 2021 event – scheduled for July 10 – will also feature the Crychan, Halfway and Llyn Login stages with a competitive distance of approximately 45 miles.

The rally received a boost two weeks ago when organisers were given the go ahead to run despite the Military of Defence using the Epynt military range at around the same time as the rally, something that led to a second postponement of the Tour of Epynt asphalt event.

Nicky Grist said: "For such a long time we have seriously missed our fix of adrenalin when it comes to rally cars in a forest, but it is not far away now! The organising team are full steam ahead in organising the 2021 edition of the event. Clerk of the course Neil Cross is putting together an exciting route. I look forward to seeing you all in July."

Plans are being drawn up for the Nicky Grist event

Gp B cars can't score points

GROUP B CARS OUT OF THE RETRO RALLYCROSS POINTS-PAYING POSITIONS

Group B cars have been banned from scoring points in the Retro Rallycross championship's four-wheel-drive category with immediate effect.

The cut-off date for cars competing in the four-wheel-drive Retro RX category has been extended to December 31 1999, and while Group B cars will be able to compete at events, they will be ineligible to score points this year.

"We have received interest from a range of competitors in joining this exciting new class," said Retro Rallycross coordinator, Shirley Gibson. "The wonderful cars that we saw last season are expected to join us again for 2021 and we are very excited at the prospect of further growth in the coming weeks.

"The extended cut-off date offers the chance for four-wheel-drive cars which find the Supercar class out of reach. Looking back through the history of the sport there are some amazing four-wheel-drive machines that were used in both European and British rallycross that would fit well into the series. We will present Group B cars at our events [but] they will not be competing for points."

Subaru Impreza driver Ian Flitney, champion in the Retro RX four-wheel drive last year, received a prize fund of £1000 for his success and is expected to rejoin the class this year.

SAYER AND THOMAS SIGN UP FOR BMW MINI CHALLENGE

Former Junior Rallycross Championship racers Archie Thomas and Ben Sayer will both move full-time into the single-make BMW Mini category with the British Rallycross Championship 5 Nations Trophy this year.

Thomas made his maiden start in the class in the opening round of the campaign last year in a Tony Bardy Motorsport-built Mini, but was unable to contest the second and third round double-header due to coronavirus-related restrictions.

Sayer contested his last season in the single-make Suzuki Swift Junior RX series last term and finished the year third in the standings. He will graduate to the BMW Mini class in a sister car to that of Thomas.

Also committing to the Mini category is regular racer Andy Hawkes, but instead of campaigning his own car, he will race that of his title-winning brother Martin, the latter set to race a Mini Clubman in 5 Nations BRX rounds this year. Dave Ellis, Abbie McGuinness, Steve Brown, Bradley Turner, Wesley Wickens, Darren Bleasdale and Leigh-Anne Sedgewick are also among those to have committed to the category.

Thomas will make return

POSITION AVAILABLE

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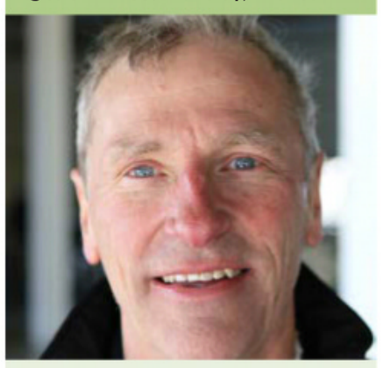
HISTORICS

DOWN THE PUB

DAVID TOMLIN

Historic all-rounder
Age: 64 **Lives:** Martley, Worcs



Tomlin: in the very hot seat

He was a karter

"I did some karting as a teenager, then university, career and kids came along. I didn't come back into the sport until I was 40 and that was in long-circuit karting in 1999 and 2000. I then bought a car for the Ferrari Classic race series. I had a 328 originally and raced in that for several years and then moved on to a 430."

He did some long-distance rallies

"I did the London to Cape Town long-distance rally in a Land Rover Defender in 2012 and I met up with Grant Tromans. He was racing with Raceworks and when you are in the middle Africa you tend to have a few beers. He said he was racing a Cortina and said why didn't I get a Cortina? So I ran that in 2012 and 2013 and it went from there with various cars."

He has an engineering business

"I still run an engineering business and work hard and that allows me to go racing. We make specialist health care chairs. I hope to do Le Mans Classic for the third time this year in the Lola T210 sports-racing car, providing it is able to run as planned on the first weekend of July."

He had two car fires last season

"I did some races last year but my Formula 2 car caught fire at Brands in July and in August at Thruxton my Ford Sierra RS500 exploded after fuel vapour collected in the cockpit. I burned my face and was in hospital for a couple of days. But I recovered from that and raced the RS500 at Silverstone in October and had a win."

He also rallies a Ford Escort Mk2

"We've probably done around 10 rallies over the last two or three years. But we didn't do a rally at all last year. I did the Roger Albert Clark Rally at the end of 2019 and haven't done anything since. I'll do that again this year in the Escort Mk2."

He'll be back racing at Easter

"I'll start racing at Donington at Easter for the Masters event, which includes Historic F2 as the Motul is now fixed after the engine fire last year. It looks like being quite a busy year because I'm also going to be rallying a Ford Fiesta R5 and I think that will be enough for me."

Photos: Paul Lawrence

McRae will be back at the wheel of Vauxhall-Chevrolet

ICONS SIGN UP FOR NEW HISTORIC RALLY FESTIVAL SHOW

Famous names to take part in Brunton Airfield demonstration event

By Paul Lawrence

Jimmy McRae, Louise Aitken-Walker, Barry Lee and Brian Culcheth are some of the famous rallying names pledged to take part in the Lombard Rally Festival Newcastle at Brunton Airfield near Seahouses on July 3.

The north-eastern event is the latest demonstration rally from Tim Nash and the team behind the Lombard Rally Bath. It will be the first of three such events this summer before the next edition of the Bath event in late October.

Further one-venue events are planned for Bowling Park in Bradford on July 24 and at Parc Bryn Bach in South Wales on August 21. There are plans for the Newcastle event to become a three-day tour with special stages in 2022.

The three-mile demonstration stage at Brunton will be used six times during the day by at least 50 period rally cars. McRae will drive the Chevrolet-powered Vauxhall Firenza of Mick Strafford, Aitken-Walker will drive an Escort RS1800 and Culcheth will drive an Austin 1800 'land crab'.

In the evening, Lee will host a forum and car display at nearby Bamburgh Castle.

Nash has confirmed that all the events will run under the control of Motorsport UK with local motor clubs organising the demonstration stages.

"Following long discussions with Motorsport UK a further 'hybrid' permit based on the Stage Rally Demonstration Permit has been made available to us for all future events," Nash told Motorsport News. "Special supplementary regulations have been agreed for our events to allow cars that would not fall within the normal permit to enter."

Fans will be able to clap eyes on historic racing beauties

Fans allowed to see Donington extravaganza

The Donington Historic Festival will go ahead on May 1-2 with a full programme of racing and spectators admitted.

Having lost the 2020 event to the pandemic, promoter Duncan Wiltshire was determined to resume the event this season and has confirmed that the 2021 event is going ahead.

"The green light is very much on for the Donington Historic Festival," said Wiltshire. "Entries for Motor Racing Legends' grids have been open for a while now, and the level of support is looking fantastic.

"The timetable is still flexible at this time, but we can confirm which races will run on which days," said Wiltshire. "We have scheduled qualifying to be on the same day as the race for each grid to help minimise the need for overnight stays for those more local to Donington."

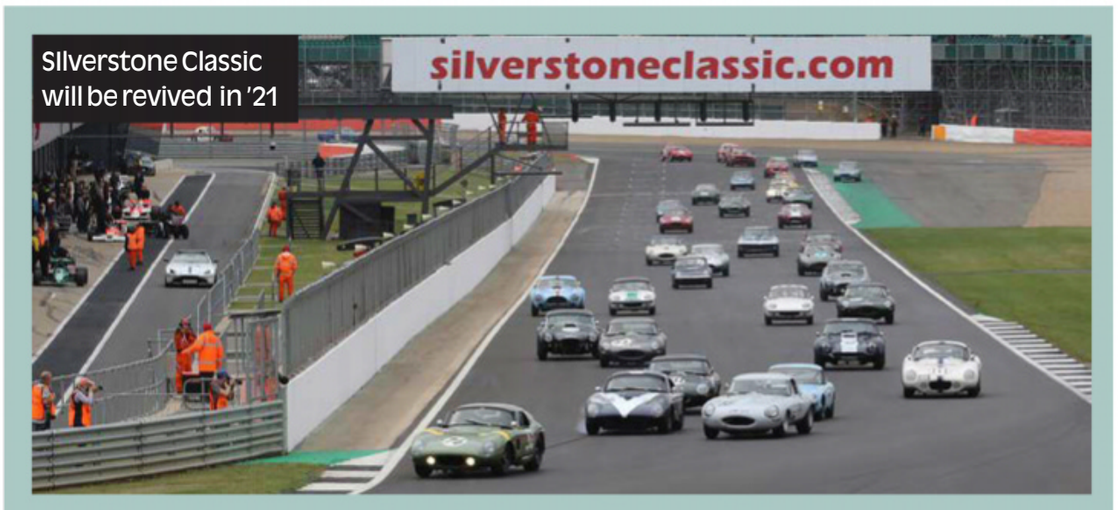
Full steam ahead for European rally clash

The FIA has announced a nine-event scheduled for the European Historic Rally Championship, which it hopes will run as planned despite the ongoing pandemic.

The nine rallies are those that would have formed last year's calendar before it was cancelled and the season is due to start in Italy with the 36th San Remo Rally Storico on April 9-11.

The only gravel rally is the Lahti Rally in Finland in August, while the usual season-opener, the Rally Costa Brava in Spain has moved from March to be the season finale in November.

The San Remo and Rallye du Valais return to the schedule, replacing the Ypres Historic Rally and the Rally Alpi Orientali.



Silverstone Classic will be revived in '21

FULL LINE-UP FOR CLASSIC REBIRTH IN 2021

Fifteen high-profile historic racing grids will be in the race line-up for the return of the Silverstone Classic this summer.

The 2020 Classic was lost to the Covid pandemic, so this year's event (30 July-1 August) will include a delayed 30th anniversary 'Greatest Hits' edition of the event.

"When we were forced to postpone our 30th birthday party last summer, we vowed to offer visitors an even bigger and better celebration in 2021 – our brilliant race card certainly does that," said promoter Nick Wigley. "The line-up not only includes all the 'Greatest Hits' grids as promised 12 months ago but also the bonus of Mini and E-type anniversary showdowns."

IN BRIEF

Marshall auction

A collection of items from the late Gerry Marshall will be auctioned online by Silverstone Auctions on March 27-28. The collection includes trophies, tankards and limited-edition paintings from his career as one of Britain's most colourful and successful national racers. More details are available at bit.ly/3qlt4C5

Short clubmen

The loss of this year's East Anglian Classic, planned for June but now cancelled due to the Covid pandemic, has trimmed the HRCR Clubmans Rally Championship to eight events. The season will now start with the North Yorkshire Classic on July 3 and run through to the Devil's Own on October 23. The schedule includes the Tour of Cheshire, on September 25.

Historic F3 in June

The Historic Formula 3 season will now start at Cadwell Park in June. Plans to open with two races at the Vintage Sports-Car Club meeting at Silverstone in April have been shelved due to the current situation. The championship will now run over 10 races at five Historic Sports Car Club race weekends.

Donington line-up

The Donington Historic Festival outline race schedule for Saturday (May 1) includes the Woodcote Trophy & Stirling Moss Trophy race, the Jaguar Classic Challenge and the Amon Cup for Ford GT40s. Sunday (May 2) will include the three-hour Pall Mall Cup, the 'Mad Jack' Pre-War Sports and the Historic Touring Car Challenge.

Trials are back!

The Historic Sporting Trials Association has confirmed two spring dates for trials after a run of cancelled trials over more than 14 months due to Covid. The Ron Faulkner Trial will run on Saturday April 24 at a site near Petersfield while the Midland Trials Car Club will run a trial at Long Compton in Warwickshire on Saturday May 15.

HRCR is off

The Historic Rally Car Register has abandoned plans to run its 2021 Open Day in April due to the rules on public indoor gatherings. The annual event was originally postponed from its traditional January date and is now scheduled to return on January 15, 2022. The event at Gaydon is a popular kick-off for the historic rallying year.

Jaguar fun

A major event to mark 60 years of the iconic Jaguar E-type will be held at Shelsley Walsh on June 12-13. A full weekend of E-type related activity, both on and off the famous Worcestershire hillclimb venue, will include a guest appearance by rallying legend Paddy Hopkirk. Competition on the hill will be part of the mix, with E-types playing a central role.

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FEATURE

WILL GOLLOP 'THE GRAND PRIX WINS WERE THE BEST'

Hal Ridge poses the MN readers' questions to an unassuming rallycross legend

The most successful British rallycrosser: Will Gollop

Will Gollop remains the most recent home-grown driver to have claimed an FIA rallycross crown in the discipline's top category, and that was back in 1992. And he did so in a monstrous, Bi-Turbo MG Metro 6R4.

Gollop hails from just up the road from Lydden Hill, rallycross's birthplace, and it was the creation of this branch of motorsport that attracted him into competition.

Having proved himself in two-wheel-drive categories, Gollop secured works support to step into the top category with Austin Rover's banned Group B rally machine. When Group B was also banned from rallycross, Gollop built Peugeots, an ill-fated 309 before a 306, and claimed further British championship titles, adding to his three Rallycross Grand Prix wins.

His retirement from driving turned Gollop into team boss, and his G-Tech Motorsport concern ran protege Andrew Jordan in the British Rallycross Championship in 2006 and 2007, just missing out on the title. Almost 30 years after claiming the European crown, Gollop took the time to answer MN readers' questions.

Question: How did you get into motorsport, and rallycross?
Johannes Schiller
Via Instagram
Will Gollop: "I started when I was 20 years old, in 1970 in autocross and I got into it because Lydden Hill was the local track. I remember being 17 and the first rallycross being down there, I worked as an agricultural engineering apprentice in Canterbury and some of the lads in the workshop were keen on this new sport of rallycross."

Question: Why did you choose to race Saabs?
David Smith
Via Instagram
WG: "Because it was different. I spent a fair bit of time in a Mini in autocross and then rallycross, and we decided to sell the Mini because we needed the money or something, the usual story. I bought a Triumph Toledo and put a Dolomite Sprint engine in it. That didn't go so well, it was rear-wheel drive and I don't know why I don't like rear-wheel drive but I certainly get on better with front-wheel drive.

"I had a friend, Brian Stabler, who said to me 'why don't you get a Saab 99 and put that Dolomite Sprint engine in?'

"The engine fitted straight on the top of the gearbox, it was meant to be a cheap BDA I suppose. It was cheap but fragile. It still worked reasonably well though."

Photos: RallycrossWorld.com

Gollop moved away from Minis and chose a Saab

On full attack in Norway in 1988

Rallycross heroes assembled: Mark Rennison (left), Gollop, Martin Schanche and John Welch (right)

Question: Did you ever consider building a Saab to race in the top class?
Paul Davies
Via Instagram
WG: "Yes I did. But we looked at it, my wife Linda and I, and decided that it was going to cost money that we didn't have. I wanted to go to the top four-wheel-drive class and that was my last-ditch attempt to get works backing: writing to [Austin Rover boss] John Davenport."

Question: How did you get into racing an MG Metro 6R4 so early in the switch to Group B cars?
Jason Banks
Via Twitter
WG: "We could all see what the manufacturers were going to do with the cars they had built for Group B rallying. The only one I could see who didn't have anybody for rallycross, because other drivers had been involved with Ford before, for example, was Austin Rover. I got my publicity girl to write a nice letter to John Davenport. I said 'just write to him and tell him how good I am', because I couldn't do it myself. He replied saying come up with a trailer and have a meeting. That's what we did. He said we needed an international engine, so they would supply one of those, and basically a whole car's worth of bits. I was living the dream!"
MN: How big a shift was that. Going from doing everything yourself at home, to having a manufacturer link?
WG: "It was good. I was quite happy to work with the engineers there. But I soon realised that they were going to sell all the 6R4s and that would be the end of it. I expected the works deal to go on longer than it did, it didn't last long. In the meantime I'd been given a lot of parts and I could help other people get into 6R4s as well as making some money to carry on racing one."

"I always wanted to race at the very top"

Will Gollop

Question: What was the attraction of going to race in Europe?
Tim Spool
Via Twitter
WG: "I just wanted to race at the top. I'd always admired Martin Schanche as someone to compete with, and British Rallycross at the time was just about getting back on its feet. It was quite difficult when I first got the Metro, there was no down time with the Rallycross Grand Prix and the Shell Oils Championship [in the winter]. You worked all winter still racing, then you'd come to the summer and you'd got to try and do the British and European championships on a very small budget. I mean I did get a budget from Rover, but it wasn't anything to write home about that's for sure."

Question: Who was your biggest competitor in rallycross?
Jan (Jakkestrallie1976)
Via Instagram
WG: "Martin Schanche first, and Kenneth Hansen second."

Question: What was your relationship with Martin Schanche like?
Marius Johansen
Via Instagram
WG: "Good really. The only thing that did annoy me a bit was that he was very reluctant to come to the podium, he was very often conspicuous by his absence if he hadn't won. But apart from that I really admire the guy. He's a good engineer and a brilliant racer. You could race with him as close as you like and never have a problem."
MN: You were both quite similar in being engineer-drivers?
WG: "I think later than that with Kenneth Hansen too, and look where he's gone. They are engineers first and racers second. That's why I always liked rallycross, because it left you a load of scope to what you wanted to do to your car."

Question: What is your favourite Martin Schanche story?
Roy Dempster
Via Twitter
WG: "There's been so many. One of my best races was in 1991 Massmechelen in Belgium. Martin beat me to the first corner. I tucked in behind him for three laps. Coming down the hill there, the quickest line around the next corner was slightly sideways with the front just rubbing the wall. I was behind Martin and catching him there every time. I remember seeing him look in his mirror, it's amazing to think that really now, and he came off the throttle for some reason, and I bumped him in the back, not very hard. Into the next corner, which is a long Tarmac corner that winds into a hairpin, he was on my outside and I could see all four tyres light up on the [Ford] RS200 and he slid wide and went in the sand trap.
"He wasn't too pleased about it and protested on the day. It was declared a racing incident, so he took it to appeal and I stood up in the meeting and said 'I look at it as if Mr Schanche hit me because he stopped accelerating at the same rate. He actually backed into me.' Martin stood up and said 'Well I'm sorry I reversed into Mr Gollop.' It came down on my side in the end."

Question: Is there more or less contact is rallycross now than in your era? Why? Car strength? Driver style?
Andrew Coley
Via Twitter
WG: "I think there is about the same amount of contact. In Group B days when the panels used to fall off easier,

continued on page 16

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FEATURE

that looked like it was more."
MN: Did you have to strengthen the 6R4 rally car for rallycross use?
WG: "When we built the Bi-Turbo car we had to weigh a whole lot more because it was a 2.3-litre turbo. We had to weight 1100kgs, we probably weighed about 1000kgs before that, so we made double thickness wings, and made the door sills out of three millimetre aluminium. They were quite a good thing, they didn't do any harm to anything but they meant you could run alongside people."

Question: Was the accident you had on the exit of Chessons Drift at Lydden Hill in the 6R4 in 1991 the biggest of your career?
Ben Hutchins
Via email
WG: "It probably was the biggest, the second biggest was on Chessons too, in a Saab I went end over end, I was looking out of the windscreen seeing the ground going along, and thought 'this is going to hurt'.

"The Metro 6R4 crash, if you look at the race on YouTube and watch the start, I knew that they wanted to make sure they got the race underway in one go, instead of several jump starts. I didn't take advantage of it, but some of the drivers did. I went when the lights went green, but people were going past me by then. I thought I'd go around the outside of Pat Doran, foolishly. The bank at Lydden was the reason there was so much damage. It was stepped, I caught it, the car bounced out and I got collected by poor old Gary Baker (in an RS200).

"I remember sitting in the car when it all stopped thinking 'I'll get out in a minute', then I could feel the flames licking passed my ears. The reason it hadn't caught fire straight away was because the fire extinguisher had got hit from the passenger side and gone off. An automatic fire extinguisher!"

Question: How much power did the Bi-Turbo Metro have?
Torsten (rx_torseten65)
Via Instagram
WG: "Cliff Humphreys and I dyno-ed that engine first. Cliff was a brilliant engineer but he wasn't used to turbo engines of that sort of power. We ran it up to about 500bhp and he was happy with that, but I said we hadn't reached temperature on the turbos yet. I think we ran it up to 600. That was the first time, and we were really pleased with it. It was quite a different thing to get in the car and make it all work. We used to rebuild it at the end of each season, it was such a reliable engine. But in races we used to run it at far more boost, so we calculated the horsepower at about 750. It was certainly a beautiful noise"

Question: What did you think of the Lousada track in Portugal?
Leonel Coelho
Via Instagram
WG: "I loved it, it was brilliant, with all those people in the half-built hotel overlooking the track. It's such a shame they don't have big events there anymore."

"Electric cars are going to be far cheaper"
Will Gollop

The 6R4 was destroyed at Lydden Hil in 1991

Kent man's favourite event was the Rallycross Grand Prix at Brands

Gollop tackling the Croft chicane in the Peugeot 306 in 1994

Question: I've always wondered why you seemed to have more issues with taking tyres off rims compared to Schanche* et al. *That really sticks out in my mind as a child. Was it a driving style issue or something else?
Paul Kendrick
Via Twitter
WG: "Definitely driving style, but to be fast you'd got to push it to the limit. We used to have tyres come off even in the naturally aspirated car. We got some wheels made with a very sharp bead, and the Avon guy used to moan because he had a job to get them on.

"We did consider sticking the tyres on, which we did and it worked quite well actually, but you had to hack saw them off. The sharper bead did help. I couldn't believe it in the 1990 Grand Prix, when the tyre came off going onto the Knife Edge, because it's not high grip there. My first grand prix win [in 1988] was on three tyres too."

Question: What was it like racing in the Rallycross Grand Prix at Brands Hatch with all the thousands of fans there?
Chris Grey
Via Instagram
WG: "To start with it was on prime time television on Saturday afternoon, with Murray Walker commentating which was always good. It was fairly local to us, a great track and something you really got a buzz from.

"When I look back on the Rallycross Grand Prix, I got in the B final once with the Saab, but that was the other reason for moving to four-wheel drive, because I wanted to really compete at the Rallycross Grand Prix. They had 25,000 people there, and on Sunday morning you could hear an atmosphere in the paddock. If you watch the footage of one year when Schanche has a problem and I pass him, the crowd is like scoring a goal in the cup final."
MN: Obviously winning the European championship in 1992 is a career high point, how do the Grand Prix wins compare?
WG: "I would have said the Grand Prix, and winning it three times, was the highlight of my career."

Question: Did the Will Gollop supporters club that was run in the 1980s give you a boost?
Steve (Wildwacker)
Via Instagram
WG: "Yes it did, they worked really hard with merchandise, they were always there and very supportive. It didn't get as big as we thought it might have, because rallycross started to wane off at that time."

Question: Who races harder, Pat Doran or Liam Doran, in your opinion?
Andrew Coley
Via Twitter
WG: "I don't really know because I never raced with Liam. He certainly was quite a hard driver to race with by the look of things. Pat was alright, not too aggressive. I think who races harder is a difficult question."

Question: Which of your cars was your favourite?
HC Building Supplies
Via Twitter
WG: "The Metro 6R4, the Bi-Turbo. Well actually, the 410 horsepower naturally aspirated Metro, I really had to be on it at the Rallycross Grand Prix to beat the turbo cars, the Ford RS200s and the Peugeot 205 T16s. It was a good car: Cliff and I did some development work on the camshafts and bits for the sump that made the engine not breathe so hard. We ended up with about 425bhp I think which was probably one of the best of the 3.0-litre engines. It was good being the underdog, it was more difficult being the top dog with the Bi-Turbo."

Question: What happened with the 6R4 after you won the European championship in 1992?
Koen Soenens
Via Instagram
WG: "I wish I still owned it now. I sold it to a hillclimb driver in Ireland. We needed to sell it because we had an overdraft about the value of that, so to carry on we had to sell it. As it happened I think we should have kept it and done the British championship with it. It was getting some budget to do that was hard."

Question: Do you think the change from Group B to A was bad for you [for the 1993 season]?
Manuel Santos
Via Instagram
WG: "It made things hard. We got a bit of help from [Peugeot Sport UK boss] Mick Linford to build a Peugeot, but nothing to set the world alight. We built a 309 which was a real learning car for 1993, we had to try but we were never going to defend our championship with the 309 when it was done.

"It had a lot of 205 T16 bits in it, but basically the engine was never going to be good enough. Cliff built the first few engines for that car and I built the latest engine, the Mi16 when it was in the 306 [from 1994]. Then we got it working really well in the British championship that's for sure and I gradually got it better on steering, suspension and it proved a point, it worked."

Question: If you had the chance to drive any other rallycross car, past or present, what would it be?
James Harrold
Via Instagram
WG: "Matti Alamaki's (Peugeot 205) T16. That looked like every bit of that car was right. It's a shame they banned Group B cars from rallycross, that's for sure."

Question: If you could build a Supercar for this year, what would it be and why?
Adam Walker
Via Instagram
Question: Be honest: what do you think of rallycross going electric…?
Tim Voeten
Via Instagram
WG: I'd build an electric car. And I'd make it make some noise. I think that's all that's missing. Electric cars are going to be far cheaper to run and build in the first place, and they're going to be safer, they won't roll so easily, and we can't keep burning petrol. I've burnt enough petrol in my life not to be proud of. So an electric car, but take your pick about the car. But I do think to put on a spectacle, electric cars need to make some noise. That must be possible, linked to the throttle pedal, and in two years' time we won't be thinking about petrol engines anymore."

Question: Do you still watch World RX? And if yes, do you follow a certain driver?
Jan (Jakkestrallie1976)
Via Instagram?
WG: "Yes I watch rallycross and thoroughly enjoy it, and even my wife Linda watches it as well. The production of it has been good and they've got a great commentator. It's good stuff. I think I like the two Hansen boys best, I'm going to pick two."

Question: What went through your head

Gollop won the European Rallycross crown in 1992

when I destroyed your beautiful Ford Focus [Supercar] at Blyton [in 2006]?
Andrew Jordan
Via Twitter
WG: "I thought 'are we going to be able to put it back together and get out in the next run?' I didn't worry about the fact that Andrew had done it. That's racing. He drove really well and that was just one time he overstepped the mark just slightly, and I must have done that 50 times in my career. I bet my face didn't tell a story because I'm told I've got a very serious face, and I'd have had a very serious face on that day."

Question: Was it actually more painful having me stay at your house for a week to try and help repair it (get in the way)?
Andrew Jordan
Via Twitter
WG: "No, that was fine. I remember [mechanic] Ryan Lawford was with us and I made them, Andrew especially, do some jobs that he perhaps didn't like, but we had to get it back together. Then we as a team made up for it because we won the next round, that was our first win together. Andrew's a special driver. I didn't know what it was going to be like when we started with him. I met Mike Jordan at Knockhill I think, when Andrew was in the [Junior] Mini. I didn't particularly want to drive the Focus myself anymore so I said yes, let's give it a go. Andrew always struck me as a driver who thought about things and built up his speed rather than having outright speed to start with. He's a good lad, our Andrew."
MN: You went to work with Jordan in BTCC too?
WG: "Yeah for two years I think, but it was getting to the point where I could help technically but not tactically. You need to know a few tricks, as in any sport, and I still loved rallycross." ■

Gollop had a new lodger to help with the rebuild of the Ford Focus

Three-wheeling in European Championship in Portugal 1991

Apprentice and master: Andrew Jordan listens to tips from Gollop

The one Will Gollop would like to have tried: the Peugeot 205 T16

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FEATURE

THE NEW DESIGNS ON FORMULA 1 SUCCESS

Scott Mitchell runs the rule over the line-up for this year's grand prix grid

The Formula 1 launch season 2021, this year mostly taking place virtually, was a godsend for some grand prix teams. But it was also highly frustrating.

It allowed those who wanted to hide any last-minute tweaks to do so with some well edited shots. It also meant that no one was really sure what they had actually seen.

It wasn't until the cars hit the track in Bahrain last week for pre-season testing that there was nowhere to hide, and the secrets the teams had tried to keep were revealed in full.

Some have taken some sensible and productive steps forward, while others have flattered to deceive. Our man in the paddock, Scott Mitchell, takes us through the significant developments.

MERCEDES

The new Mercedes has a trick rear-end design (inset)

CAR: W12
ENGINE: MERCEDES-AMG F1 M12
DRIVERS: LEWIS HAMILTON, VALTTERI BOTTAS
2020 CONSTRUCTORS: 1ST

Formula 1's benchmark team gets the basics right, has the creativity to handle rule changes with apparent ease and always turns up to pre-season well-prepared.

The aerodynamic rule changes could be a banana skin of sorts: a reduced floor area with fewer slots, shortened diffuser fences and simplified rear brake duct appendages have all been introduced to reduce rear downforce.

Mercedes has made it very clear that one of its chief concerns is whether it has done a good enough job to claw back the lost performance.

To that end, Mercedes launched its W12 while hiding its floor, as it was concealing a curious, waved-edge design more advanced than anything its rivals showed up to testing with.

On the engine front, Mercedes is boosted by fresh innovations and an improvement on existing concepts – trading the aluminium block for an alloy alternative, and reworking the MGU-K to eradicate its chief 2020 fragility.

Off-track, Mercedes has had to adjust to the new cost cap, which means finding new efficiencies to try and pack the same title-winning punch at less than half the financial weight.

Photos: Motorsport Images

RED BULL

The Red Bull was the star of early testing in Bahrain

CAR: **RB16B**
ENGINE: **HONDA RA621H**
DRIVERS: **MAX VERSTAPPEN, SERGIO PEREZ**
2020 CONSTRUCTORS: **2ND**

Red Bull went a long way to hiding its car at the launch, to the point only two renders had been released by the time the RB16B broke cover at testing.

Now it's been sighted, the most interesting element of the Red Bull is the rear suspension, which has followed Mercedes' lead from 2020 by sweeping back the lower wishbone.

Red Bull has facilitated that in a slightly different way, but it's so far unclear exactly what form that fundamental piece of car architecture takes.

It likely explains the rumours that Red Bull's token spend has been on a new gearbox, which will be mated to a heavily-upgraded Honda engine. The Japanese manufacturer has brought forward a design it was going to wait until 2022 to unleash – which means it will leave F1 this year having thrown everything at Red Bull's 2021 title push.

There were some rumours in the off-season that Red Bull had been stymied by some Honda reliability concerns. But the car's first running at testing was quick, and reliable, much to the delight of star driver Max Verstappen.

McLAREN

CAR: **MCL35M**
ENGINE: **MERCEDES-AMG F1 M12**
DRIVERS: **LANDO NORRIS, DANIEL RICCIARDO**
2020 CONSTRUCTORS: **3RD**

McLaren has the biggest change of any team in 2021 as its car is the only one with a different engine in the back compared to 2020.

The Woking squad has switched to Mercedes after three seasons with Renault, reuniting with the manufacturer it split from after 2014. And we all know how well that went.

Going back to Mercedes should deliver McLaren an instant performance gain, but it has come at a cost. McLaren has had to work hard to accommodate the Mercedes engine as, while all of the manufacturers must use the same mounting points, the fundamental shape and designs very and this means they each have unique cooling requirements and geometries.

To that end, McLaren had to forfeit its development tokens – so the changes on the MCL35M compared to its predecessor are purely what it needed to do to house the new engine.

There are still innovations though, namely a beautifully complex bargeboard arrangement – even by the standards of modern F1 – and also a unique take on how to adapt the diffuser around the new aero rules for this season.

The McLaren has been adapted to a new engine

continued on page 20

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FEATURE

ASTON MARTIN

Upgraded gearbox and suspension will help AMR21

CAR: AMR21
ENGINE: MERCEDES-AMG F1 M12
DRIVERS: SEBASTIAN VETTEL, LANCE STROLL
2020 CONSTRUCTORS: 4TH (AS RACING POINT)

The return of Aston Martin for the first time since 1960 means the return of British Racing Green to the F1 grid...sort of.

But the new metallic green livery, with a splash of pink, is far from the former Racing Point team's most exciting change for 2021.

Technically, the AMR21 benefits from a Mercedes 2020 gearbox and rear suspension. Aston Martin was previously using the 2019-spec Mercedes rear end, and it is permitted to make a 'free' upgrade despite the car carry-overs because the team will still only be using year-old parts. It has facilitated that by spending its development tokens on a chassis modification.

It makes the AMR21 one of the most exciting on the grid, especially as the team underperformed with its predecessor the RP20. Behind the wheel is star signing four-time World champion Sebastian Vettel. Which all adds up to mean this car bearing the Aston Martin name is destined to be far more competitive than the last one some 61 years ago.

The Alpine features a massive airbox

ALPINE

CAR: ALPINE A521 ENGINE: RENAULT E-TECH 20B DRIVERS: FERNANDO ALONSO, ESTEBAN OCON 2020 CONSTRUCTORS: 5TH (AS RENAULT)

The rebranded Renault team has gained quite a lot of attention around the launch of its new Alpine-badged A521, but not necessarily for the right seasons.

For a while in the off-season Alpine looked in disarray following the departure of long-time Renault team boss Cyril Abiteboul and the absence of a direct replacement. Then the A521 was launched with confirmation Alpine will have no team principal: executive director Marcin Budkowski will share the responsibilities with Suzuki MotoGP recruit Davide Brivio.

The car itself had no immediately striking features upon its unveiling but that changed substantially when it hit the track and the monster airbox-engine cover combination was revealed.

Its bulbous design – which is Alpine's way of moving around the internals to make the sidepods tighter – drew comical comparisons to the tall-airbox grand prix cars of the 1970s, especially the 1976 Ligier, and the team even joked it was being 'body shamed'.

New signing Fernando Alonso, back in F1 and racing with titanium plates in his jaw after a cycling accident over the winter, will hope the bodywork is all Alpine's rivals have to laugh at.

Engine upgrades are crucial for Ferrari

FERRARI

CAR: SF21 ENGINE: FERRARI 065/6 DRIVERS: CHARLES LECLERC, CARLOS SAINZ 2020 CONSTRUCTORS: 6TH

A two-part launch meant Ferrari's build-up to the season has been staggered and the messaging around its progress has also been disjointed.

What was being touted as a significant engine step last year – capable of making Ferrari's the third-best, rather than a distant fourth, had it been able to upgrade the 2020 engine during the season – is now being murmured to 'only' be worth around 20bhp.

Though Ferrari never believed it would eradicate its deficit, it appears the engine's not had quite the overhaul some might have anticipated. That's despite a revised turbocharger, updated combustion engine and engine recovery system, and new fuel and oil all forming part of the new engine's make-up.

The car needed improving too, and Ferrari's focused on the rear. A token spend on the gearbox and some permitted suspension tweaks have allowed the team to mimic Merc's swept-back rear end in a creative but probably less refined manner. Whether that's enough to quell the unpredictable rear end that hurt last year's car will go a long way to defining Ferrari's season.

AlphaTauri has used some upgraded front suspension parts from the 'Big Brother' team Red Bull

ALPHATAURI

CAR: AT02 **ENGINE:** HONDA RA621H **DRIVERS:** PIERRE GASLY, YUKI TSUNODA **2020 CONSTRUCTORS:** 7TH

The 'first' AlphaTauri, which wasn't really a 'first' anything given it was just a Toro Rosso rebrand, was a race-winning car thanks to Pierre Gasly's shock Italian Grand Prix victory. So it makes sense that the second Red Bull team has backed itself to evolve that nicely in 2021.

To that end, AlphaTauri opted to spend its development tokens at the front, producing a new nose that joins the trend of narrow designs. This was hidden at the car's launch but broke cover during a shakedown and was on the car in testing.

Along with the new nose, AlphaTauri has taken advantage of rules that allow users of year-old parts bought from another team a free upgrade to switch from some 2019 Red Bull front suspension components to the 2020 version. They have been married to some of AlphaTauri's own work to re-optimise the front end.

But at the rear of the car, there is no 2020-spec Red Bull suspension. AlphaTauri opted to keep the 2019 variant, evidently content that it worked quite sweetly on the AT01 and did not need to be revised for its successor.

ALFA ROMEO

CAR: C41
ENGINE: FERRARI 065/6
DRIVERS: KIMI RAIKKONEN. ANTONIO GIOVINAZZI
2020 CONSTRUCTORS: 8TH

It's hard to establish what to expect from Alfa Romeo, the team that won last season's back-of-the-grid fight against Haas and Williams and even outpaced engine supplier Ferrari once or twice too.

Ferrari's engine progress does hold the key, as it will determine whether Alfa has the power needed to re-establish itself as a permanent part of the points battle.

However, regardless of the question mark over Ferrari's power unit, Alfa itself has been a confusing team with hit-and-miss development efforts. And in Kimi Raikkonen and Antonio Giovinazzi it does not have the most illuminating driver line-up.

On the surface, the C41 is sticking to the team's core aero principles at the front – eschewing an aggressively narrow nose despite spending its development tokens on updating this very area, and taking its inboard-loaded front wing to an even more extreme level.

These are still refinements. On their own, they don't look transformational. But as this was an occasional point-scoring team last year even with a dud engine, perhaps Alfa doesn't need a revolution to make the progress it desires.

Alfa Romeo has stuck to its aero principles at the front of the C41

Expectations will be low for Haas going into 2021

HAAS

CAR: VF-21
ENGINE: FERRARI 065/6
DRIVERS: NIKITA MAZEPIN, MICK SCHUMACHER
2020 CONSTRUCTORS: 9TH

Haas says it hasn't given up on 2021 but the first look at its VF-21, and consideration of its development prospects, would make you believe otherwise.

The American team was so cash-strapped last year it didn't develop the 2020 car through the season. There were aerodynamic upgrades designed, they were just never made. Some of these developments have been incorporated into the VF-21.

However, the 2021 car will not be upgraded either. That's because Haas has decided to throw everything it has – budget, windtunnel time, and CFD work – on major new technical rules that will be introduced next year. In that spirit, Haas chose not to even spend its development tokens – so the VF-21's mechanical components are identical to the VF-20's.

Haas will, therefore, be relying on its relatively modest aerodynamic work and Ferrari's upgraded engine to make it more competitive in 2021 and get it through what it's calling a "transition year".

That makes the VF-21 the least inspiring car of the bunch, which puts little expectation on its all-rookie driver line-up of Mick Schumacher and Nikita Mazepin.

WILLIAMS

CAR: FW43B
ENGINE: MERCEDES-AMG F1 M12
DRIVERS: GEORGE RUSSELL, NICHOLAS LATIFI
2020 CONSTRUCTORS: 10TH

Williams's new FW43B has an eye-opening new livery that is quite a substantial departure from last year's simple white-and-blue design.

It's meant to usher in the new era as the team prepares for its first full season outside of family ownership, and while the colour scheme has divided opinion everything else looks emphatically better under Dorilton Capital.

The FW43B has been updated with the usual aerodynamic progress in an off-season but more substantial change has been made under the skin, where Williams has been on an extensive weight-saving exercise. The result is a lighter car that now falls under the weight limit, giving the engineers the opportunity to use ballast to help with weight distribution.

There is nothing ground-breaking on the surface of the FW43B but this car looks like another significant step forward from the team's misery of a couple of seasons ago. Behind the scenes, Dorilton has pumped in more than £100m of investment too.

Williams has not transformed into a top team again over the winter, but its run of three consecutive last-placed finishes in the championship has a good chance of ending.

There is a spring in the step at Williams

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COLUMNIST

HAL RIDGE

MN's rallycross editor says electrification should be embraced for 2021

Photos: 5 Nations BRX, STARD

British RX is taking a fresh approach

STARD has been at the forefront of electric power

Walking into the Lydden Hill paddock on Easter Weekend in 2016 for the second round of the British Rallycross Championship, I was told "with views like that you're going to kill the sport". On the back of Volkswagen making noises about electric rallycross, in Motorsport News the Wednesday leading up to the Lydden event I'd written a column outlining how well an electric support category could suit the discipline.

Since then, and increasingly so since MN revealed the following summer that the World Rallycross Championship was planning an electric switch, alternative energy in rallycross has become one of the most divisive discussion topics of the discipline.

There are those vehemently against moves to introduce anything other than internal combustion engines, those pro change and technological advance – typically those not as concerned with the noise or smell of an ICE (internal combustion engine) – and those not really bothered either way.

A fortnight ago, MN again broke electric rallycross news, this time that the 5 Nations BRX series will adopt electric cars into the headline Supercar category this year. If ever there was a case of having one's cake and eating it, surely this is it.

I'm a rallycross fan through and through, I love the sensory overload of a rallycross Supercar's anti-lag-fuelled sound and smell, and I've had the amazing opportunity to race a Supercar in the British series at Lydden Hill. I know first-hand that the buzz of watching and being inside these amazing machines is almost unbeatable.

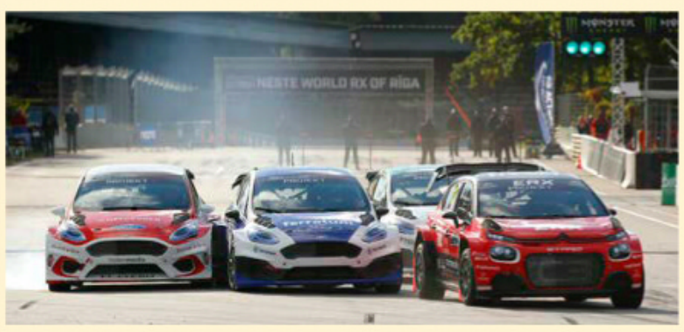
But, you're reading words written here by someone whose idea of a fun weekend is trawling through archives discovering niche facts about rallycross's Group B era. My generation is probably the last that has only known ICE-powered cars in motor racing, in our formative years at least.

I'm a realist too though, and if we want rallycross to reach the heights we all know it can or, more brutally, even survive, change has to be embraced. It's simple, when there are professional opportunities at the top, the lower levels benefit too. It's organic.

When Audi, Peugeot, Volkswagen and Ford were spending significant sums on World RX programmes, paying drivers like Andreas Bakkerud, Timmy Hansen and Sebastien Loeb to drive their cars, and mechanics and engineers to run them – just like the single-seater ladder that leads to F1 all the way from karting – people got involved in the lower levels. There are two reasons for that.

Firstly, because rallycross was exposed to a wider audience, enticing people get involved, and secondly that even if there is a crumb of hope of 'making it', people will try and live out that dream. Take 2017 British RX champion Nathan Heathcote as an example. Heathcote stepped up to the RX2 International Series that supported World RX the year after his British title with aspirations of climbing to the highest level. But when the manufacturers withdrew later that year, he and his sponsors saw fewer opportunities to reach that, and switched to the Ginetta GT4 Supercup in the BTCC support package instead.

Rallycross needs to do whatever it can to entice investment at the highest tier, that will help grow the lower levels too. For that to happen, the top needs to embrace whatever the market dictates, in this case the desires of manufacturers pressured by emissions objectives laid out by governments, likewise with other industries too. That doesn't mean everyone has to like it. It will take a long, long time for whatever happens at the very top to filter down and take over at domestic level.



Electrification has already been a hit in rallycross

The chance of British RX switching to only electric cars is such a long way off, it's not worth discussing. But what the 5 Nations BRX organisers have implemented for this year, by forming rules for STARD-built electric cars to join the Supercar grid, is a masterstroke.

I had the pleasure of driving Austrian firm STARD's initial prototype machine five years ago, and latterly the Ford Fiesta used in the Projekt E World RX support class last year. They are very capable cars and, in the right hands, can be a formidable force in 5 Nations BRX Supercar this year. Having another even one or two high-quality entries added to the Supercar class when things are so uncertain amid the pandemic has to be a good thing.

It will give great insight as to how cars using alternative technologies can perform against their ICE counterparts. I've seen mixed-propulsion racing first-hand in the Andros Trophy, and it is intriguing.

As the first series in the UK to have multiple propulsion methods in the top category, more eyes will be drawn to 5 Nations BRX this year but, more importantly, if having electric cars means that there are drivers out there who can attract backing from companies who will get behind an outwardly more sustainable project but not an ICE one, then that should be embraced.

I'm excited and intrigued in anticipation of walking into the Lydden Hill paddock this May seeing how the ICE vs EV battle on track will be received.

"The 5 Nations BRX bosses have pulled off a masterstroke"

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FEATURE

HOW STEPHANE RATEL MADE THE SPORTSCAR SCENE GO LIKE CLOCKWORK

First steps: Monza in 2011

Ten years ago, a GT racing revolution helped save the long-distance landscape, says David Addison

Ratel and SRO needed to think differently for the 2011 Spa 24 Hours

Backer Marc Hayek raced in the series alongside Peter Kox

It was a category that took GT racing back to its roots and became known by its sponsor name rather than its full title. The Blancpain Endurance Series was a success right from the start and, under its new guise of GT World Challenge Europe for 2021, it is still booming.

There isn't much that category guru Stephane Ratel gets wrong in GT racing. Even the things that aren't prefect help shape something else successful. It was while he was running the FIA GT1 World Championship in 2010 that the seeds were sown for the Blancpain Endurance Series.

As the sprint-based series ran two one-hour races, something else was needed for the blue-riband Spa 24 Hours and a non-championship race was run for GT2 cars (that were meant to have their own European championship but it never gained enough support) plus GT3 and GT4 machinery. Although the GT2 cars, few in number, disputed the win, Ratel saw enough potential in the GT3 and GT4 section to think about a series of races. Plus, he had been reminded by Luigi Dindo of Ferrari preparer Michelotto that GT racing was about endurance. At this stage, the FIA GT3 European Championship was also a pair of one-hour sprints per event. The market was ready for an endurance championship again.

Ratel had a contract with the FIA to run all GT championships, and proposed an endurance championship for GT3 cars to the FIA, the plan being to have GT1 sprint, GT3 sprint and GT3 endurance. To his surprise, the FIA said 'no', Ratel later learning that the FIA was working with the Le Mans organisers the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO) to bring back the World Endurance Championship, which would also include GT cars. It didn't want another endurance championship.

But it takes bigger obstacles than that the stop the charismatic Frenchman. Instead, he agreed with the FIA to run his own endurance series, under the banner of the GT Endurance Series, only for the ACO to object! It had just launched its GTE class and didn't want anyone else using the GT tag… Ratel thought laterally and turned to racer Marc Hayek, then the boss of Swiss watch brand Blancpain. The company has been involved in motorsport at a modest level, but Stephane said: "We launch a championship and we call it Blancpain. It will not be known as anything else." Hayek agreed and raced in the new series as well. Blancpain became a euphemism for GT racing overnight.

Grids of 40 were common in its first season, which were GT3 and GT4. In typical Ratel fashion, he built the grid from the back, looking after the amateur racer and introduced the Citation Cup (sponsored by the private jet firm) for the true amateur racer. With drivers wanting more track time, the series blossomed, five races in its first year and six in year two, always including the Spa 24 Hours.

With SRO's own TV arm looking after the coverage, which also grew massively over the following seasons, the first race was held at Monza and televised globally. It was a dramatic race, with fuel being the deciding factor, the AutOrlando Sport Porsche 911 GT3-R of Raffaele Giammaria, Paolo Ruberti and Gianluca Roda making it to the end without needing a splash and dash for fuel and making history in the process. In GT4, honours fell to the Lotus Evora of Edoardo Piscopo, partnered by Mansell brothers Greg and Leo.

Wins that season followed for Vita4one's Ferrari at Navarra, Audi Sport WRT at Spa and then the last two races, at Magny-Cours and Silverstone, to the BMW Z4 of Marc VDS Racing. The championship was fought out between WRT and Marc VDS, the two Belgian teams enjoying some fierce fights.

With his win at Spa, points being scored during the race, Audi's Greg Franchi took the crown. All season grids had been growing as drivers enjoyed the chance of long-distance GT racing once more with

> ***"The series just sky-rocketed for grid numbers"***
>
> **Stephane Ratel**

Photos: SRO

Greg and Leo Mansell raced a Lotus in 2011 Blancpain

Ratel spotted the future with GT3 endurance class

Ratel offering everyone a chance to be competitive, with a Pro and Pro-Am Cup to cater for differing levels of ability. In addition, the timetable was centred around the amateur, the one paying the bill, with administrative checks late on Friday, free practice and pre-qualifying on Saturday and then qualifying and race Sunday. The idea was simple: leave your desk on Friday lunchtime, drive a great car, and be back at your desk on Monday morning to pay for it. The venues were cleverly chosen as well, with grand prix venues being used (Navarra aside) to attract the amateur racers. Navarra fell from the calendar after a couple of seasons, Paul Ricard was introduced for a six-hour race and more recently Barcelona has joined the roster.

That opening season grew and grew, with GT regulars and single-seater guns all joining the championship that, in turn, started to attract more manufacturers and more career racing drivers to earn a living in the GT world. Actually, manufacturers is the wrong word: Ratel is very keen on the word 'brand'. Manufacturers build cars and teams run them and that is exactly how he wants it, having seen the FIA GT Championship at the mercy of manufacturers Porsche and Mercedes in the late 1990s.

Ferrari, Aston Martin, Lamborghini, Porsche, Audi, Mercedes, Chevrolet, McLaren, BMW, Ford and Dodge were all on the GT3 grid in that opening five-race season. Against the young guns and the amateurs came the likes of GT champion Michael Bartels, Mike Hezemans, Fred Makowiecki, Stephane Ortelli, Peter Kox and it wasn't long before Maxime Martin's reputation as a GT star began to grow. For the Spa 24 Hours, United Autosports brought its international racing address book with Mark Blundell, Eddie Cheever, Arie Luyendyk, Johnny Herbert and Stefan Johansson among the driving force.

As Blancpain, as the series was now known, grew in popularity, so Ratel was battling to keep the GT1 World Championship alive even having to fund some of the teams himself to keep grid sizes to a sustainable level. For 2012, with the cost of GT1 cars, the GT1 championship ran for GT3 cars, which Ratel admits, was a mistake. It couldn't continue and the championship lost races and had a shuffled calendar as SRO battled to the end of 2012. "For the first race of 2010, I went to Abu Dhabi flying first class. When we finished at Donington, I returned to London second class on the train…"

Ratel still wanted to keep the sprint race format alive and so rebranded the GT3 sprint races as the FIA GT Championship for 2013, before being renamed again as the Blancpain Sprint Series to sit alongside its successful endurance sibling. Sprint grids have never been as strong, but are aimed more at the pros than the pro-ams and has delivered some fine racing.

The 2012 season was extended by one round and ended in a slightly fractious battle again between Marc VDS and WRT but it was the Audi crew of Stephane Ortelli, Christopher Haase and Christopher Mies who triumphed by just three points ahead of the BMW team headed by player-manager Bas Leinders with Markus Palttala and Maxime Martin. It was at Navarra at the end of the season that Bentley's involvement in GT3 was announced, further evidence of the success of the category and of the championship itself.

And Blancpain, too, was gaining huge exposure as a watch brand. Owned by The Swatch Group, the company had initially joined SRO as the official timing partner, but Ratel's vision boosted the company to another level and for those first seasons a Blancpain Lamborghini raced in Pro-Am, and took a win, as Marc Hayek shared his mobile billboard with Peter Kox.

"The expression 'the Blancpain' was used to refer to the series which is an amazing token of recognition," says Hayek.

Ratel was almost embarrassed by the early success: "I had the FIA World Championship that couldn't attract teams, television or sponsors and here was unfamiliar name that sky-rocketed to success!"

Of course, over time, Blancpain evolved. As the teams were attracted to it, so they wanted to win and hence the number of Pro Cup cars increased which in turn affected Ratel's core customer, the amateur racer. Also, there were concerns over track time as, generous as a Blancpain weekend was, divided by three you didn't get a huge amount of time. To give his Ams the confidence of learning the circuit, the Bronze Test was introduced, a period for bronze-graded drivers to learn the track without looking in their mirrors all the time to jump out of the way of a Pro. And, to combat the track-time problem, Ratel came up with the GT Sports Club, single-driver races for the amateurs, which was also a home for the older cars that were no longer competitive in Blancpain. Sports Club instantly worked and Blancpain added its name to that title as well.

Eventually, Blancpain could do no more to promote its name and ended its sponsorship at the end of 2019, by which stage the GT tag had been reintroduced to the series' name to remind people what it was all about. Even now, though, people still refer to the series as Blancpain, which is proof of just how strong the series, and the SRO/Swatch Group marriage, was. And there are plenty of champions with a €30,000 winners' Blancpain watch on their wrists that are grateful for the sponsorship, too.

No-one knew what to expect at Monza in 2011 but it was an instant success and hasn't looked back. Grids have grown, the racing has been outstanding and the television coverage is market-leading. In fact, it's all gone like clockwork…■

DAVID ADDISON

MOTORSPORT NEWS COLUMNIST AT LARGE

How the Blancpain success trickled down into the national scene

I accept I am biased in this as I have been SRO's TV commentator at the majority of Blancpain Endurance Series rounds, but it is hard not to eulogise about it. The grids have always been strong, the quality of driver excellent and it has always been well-organised, the Balance of Performance being key to the quality of the racing.

And that success has had a huge effect on GT racing elsewhere with GT3 cars being eligible for domestic championships. Drivers can start in a national series and then graduate to Blanc…, sorry, the GT World Challenge Europe I should say, and teams with GT3 cars for what was Blancpain can use them domestically.

Look how strong the British GT championship now is. The ADAC GT Masters in Germany, although no longer an SRO series, benefits from SRO's GT3 template and is very strong as well. GT racing has caught on in America with the Pirelli World Challenge now GT World Challenge America and SRO now has hold of GT racing in Australia. With a common set of regulations and Balance of Performance, it is clear to see why SRO's GT portfolio is booming. And that is before we get to GT4 which is also way stronger than it was a decade ago.

GT racing nationally owes much of its success to the Blancpain Endurance Series/ GT World Challenge Europe and offers so many opportunities for young drivers. Take Sandy Mitchell who won last year's British GT championship and is now a factory Lamborghini driver. Remember, he, like so many, started in single-seaters before moving to GT racing and now has titles and a manufacturer programme to his name.

Teams are benefitting as well, like Barwell Motorsport, which has taken its domestic GT skills to Europe, won titles and had class wins in the Spa 24 Hours, and then comes back to British GT even stronger.

And even some manufacturers are clever enough to realise the benefits of SRO's GT championships, in terms of the support programme. Lamborghini was an obvious fit with Blancpain sponsorship years ago but it has remained on the support bill and has become a GT training ground for young guns before they are picked up by Lamborghini Squadra Corse and moved up the ranks.

Success breeds success they say, and while GT World Challenge Europe is a success in its own right, it has helped to shape and build so much more. And it hasn't stopped yet: for 2021 the SRO esports element is set to expand massively, with on-site events as well as virtual ones. Single-seater categories must look on in envy…

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WHAT'S ON

YOUTUBE

Line-up: Paffett, Hamilton, Alonso and de la Rosa

As Mark Gallagher on Twitter reported one former Formula 1 technical director as commenting, "I'll be interested in car launches the day a paint job wins a race".

In the previous age of F1 launches though, while they were likely no more instructive, they at least could be entertaining. F1's YouTube account looks back at the lavish launches' era with a whistle-stop run-down of its top 10 examples.

You can find it at: youtube.com/watch?v=HEYCYdB_w78 or search for 'Top 10 F1 Car Launches'.

McLaren and the Spice Girls is often harked back to (odd that Jamiroquai's presence at the same launch has slipped out of the popular consciousness. Actually, maybe it's not that odd), and there are a few more of the same ilk, such as Sauber with the Sugababes and Benetton ostentatiously taking over the ancient Sicilian town of Taormina. Honda and BAR provide strange liveries.

(Spoiler alert) number one is McLaren in a Valencia street event launching its 2007 campaign. If nothing else this wins on pathos. Fernando Alonso beams about his "new toy". Lewis Hamilton notes of his new stablemate "I'm sure that we're going to get along well". Ron Dennis predicts it'll "be a year that we're all going to remember". Quite.

Graham Keilloh

TV GUIDE

Sky Sports F1 prepares us for the impending latest Formula 1 season start in Bahrain with tomorrow a two-hour The F1 Show season preview. The show starts at 1930hrs, is repeated at 2315hrs plus is shown again early on Sunday at 0630hrs. The channel also gets us into the mood with at various points highlights of 2020's races and Bahrain Grands Prix from years past. More temptingly, on Saturday there's a chance to watch the noteworthy 1988 Monaco Grand Prix (2100hrs-2130hrs).

Famous F1 fly-on-the-wall documentary Drive to Survive has also recently landed on Sky's F1 channel and it continues today with the last two episodes of its first series, which focuses on 2018's season, at 2130hrs-2210hrs and 2215hrs-2255hrs. Series two, on 2019, kicks off tomorrow with again two episodes per evening on the same time schedule.

The 10-episode series concludes on Tuesday.

And it's not all about F1, as today on Eurosport 1 there are highlights of last year's Le Mans 24-Hour race (1200hrs-1300hrs). Plus, to continue the theme, you can also today watch a fictionalised take on Le Mans past with the Le Mans '66 film. Sky Cinema Action shows it first at 1005hrs-1240hrs and then again at 2000hrs-2235hrs.

Graham Keilloh

Monaco GP 1988 is screened

LIVE TV

V8 Supercars Sandown
- **Race 1:** Saturday 0530hrs-0700hrs, BT Sport 3
- **Race 2:** Sunday 0215hrs-0345hrs, BT Sport 3
- **Race 3:** Sunday 0515hrs-0630hrs, BT Sport 3

NASCAR Atlanta

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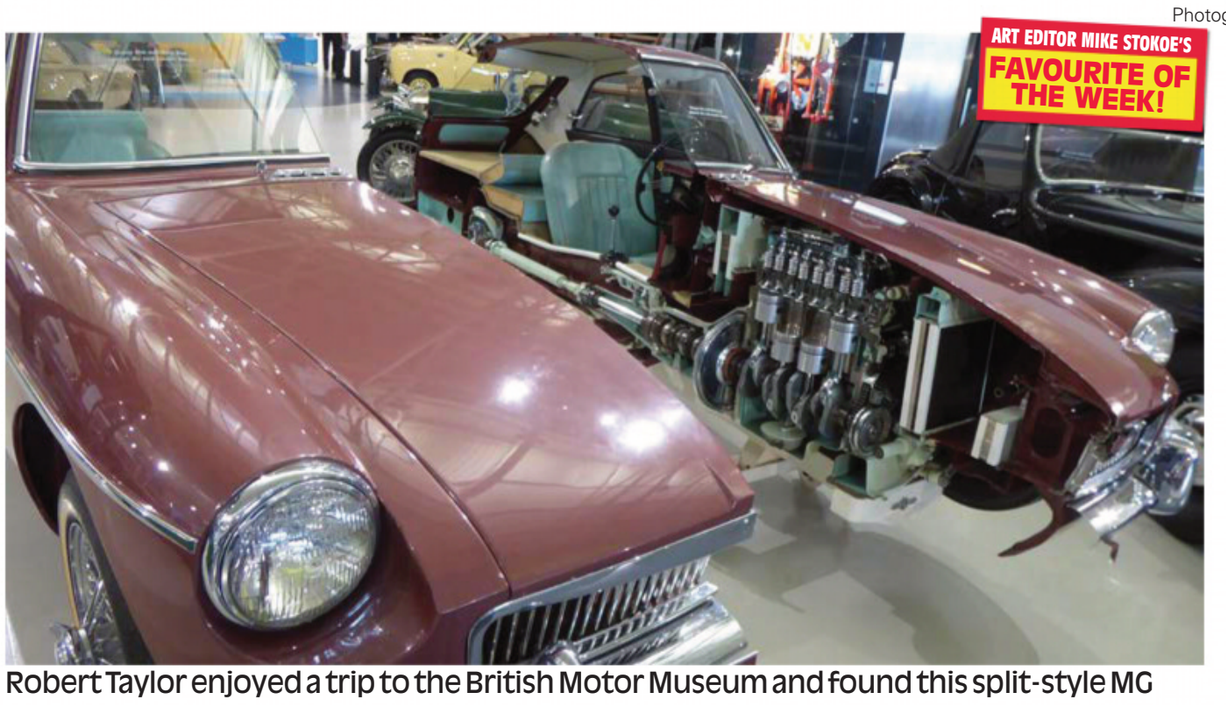
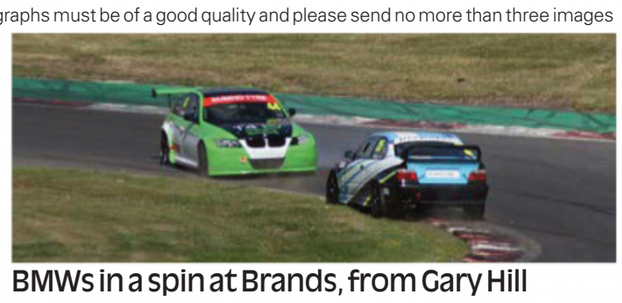


Robert Taylor enjoyed a trip to the British Motor Museum and found this split-style MG



BMWs in a spin at Brands, from Gary Hill

Neil Ormston reflects on Rockingham, 2011

A close-up on the WRC, from Dean Chilvers

Ormond Christie's Starlet, by Ian Baxendale

More from Barbon, taken by Graham Lomax

NEXT WEEK — OUT THURSDAY, MARCH 25

*Correct at time of going to press

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KARL JONES

Mr Sideways oversteers his way into the MN readers' posers

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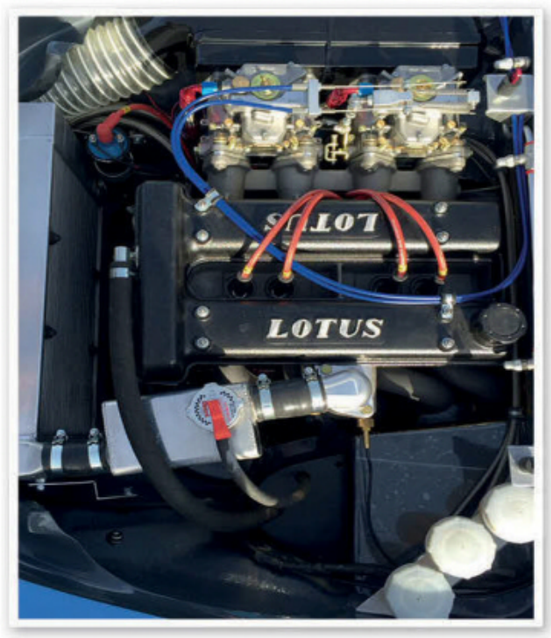

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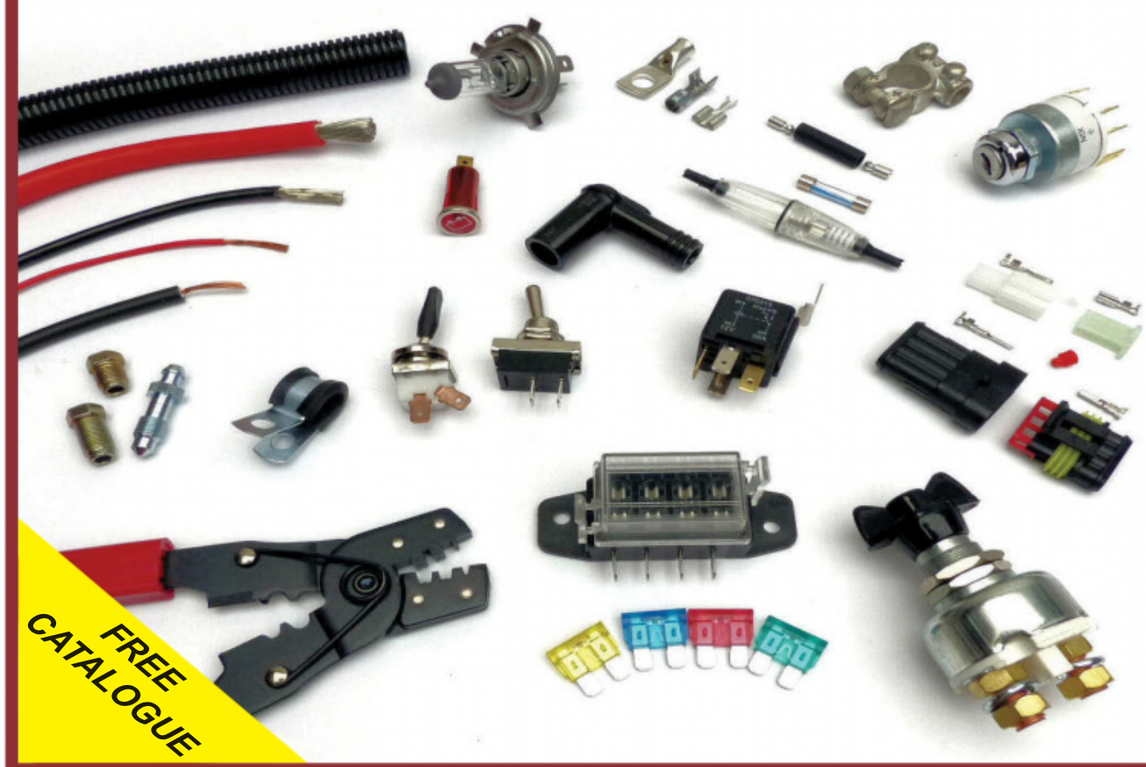

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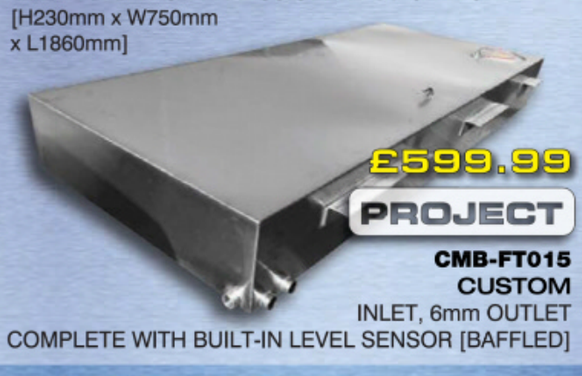

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